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Politeness in Supreme Court decisions and opinions

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Abstract

This article aims at exploring the (im/)politeness strategies developed in supreme courts' judgments and opinions. For this purpose, various politeness tokens and discourse markers ranging from sharedness markers and approximators to hedging devices and boosters are taken into account. Multi-words such as "you know", "you see", "I mean", "I think", "kind of" and "please" or "thank you" are analysed in three different corpora. The corpora considered are the following ones: a corpus composed of the judgments of the UK Supreme Court; a corpus of the opinions of the US Supreme Court, and a corpus of the decisions of the European Court of Justice. The multi-words' relative frequencies are compared across the corpora, and sample statements are extracted and analysed in detail. In this way, politeness strategies and pragmatic usages come to the fore. The paper findings reveal different distributions of relative frequencies, where the corpus of the ECJ shows the fewest occurrences. The paper also highlights various pragmatic strategies that often go beyond the politeness intents described in the literature. For example, corpus analysis brings to the surface stance markers in reformulation devices or (apparent) hedges, as well as cohesive elements in approximators. Markers of (negative) impoliteness are found in new-information tokens.

1 Aim of the paper and research questions

This paper is aimed at investigating and discussing the politeness strategies in the judgments and opinions of the UK and US supreme courts, and of the European Court of Justice. In addition, its target includes discourse markers which are ritually used in courtrooms, and conventionalized expressions through which the ritual frame is indicated. Some of the politeness elements and discourse markers dealt with in the literature are explored in corpora containing the decisions and/or opinions of the UK and US supreme courts and of the ECJ.

The research questions that this paper wishes to address are the following ones: 1) What are the (im/)politeness strategies in the decisions and opinions of the justices of the UK and

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US supreme courts and of the European Court of Justice?; 2) Are there context-dependent (i.e., legal discourse-anchored) politeness strategies?; and 3) Which kind of (im/)politeness strategies are – or are not – employed?

2 Literature review

2.1 Politeness and the language of politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) developed a theory of politeness based on face wants. Face reflects the personal self-image (ibid., p. 61). Positive face is related to the desire to be liked and accepted by others; hence, it fulfils the need to be part of a group and share common values. Negative face is aimed at maintaining one's autonomy and limiting other people's intrusion. Therefore, negative face remarks differences. Behaviours which fail to comply with face wants are defined as face-threatening acts (FTAs) (ibid., p. 65). FTAs can be performed in a variety of ways (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 69), such as: 1) baldly on record (i.e., without redressive actions); 2) by choosing a positive politeness strategy (i.e., by performing actions that address the addressee's positive face wants); 3) by choosing a negative politeness strategy (i.e., by actions that address the addressee's negative face wants); 4) by performing the FTA off-record (i.e., by implying things instead of expressing them literally); and 5) by avoiding the FTA.

In the same way, Culpeper (1996, pp. 356–358) developed a theory of impoliteness based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. Therefore, impoliteness can be manifested in five different ways: 1) baldly on record (where the FTA is performed directly and unambiguously); 2) by positive impoliteness (by damaging the addressee's positive face wants – for example, by ignoring or being unsympathetic); 3) by negative impoliteness (by damaging the addressee's negative face wants – for instance, by frightening or invading the addressee's space, either literally or metaphorically); 4) by using sarcasm or mock politeness (i.e., by developing politeness strategies that are evidently insincere); and 5) by withholding the FTA.

On the basis of such (im/)politeness frameworks, scholars have developed theories on language and discourse interactions. For example, hedging is a face-saving device concerned with the use of certain words or expressions to mitigate the directness of some utterances (O'Keeffe et al., 2007, p. 174). Hedging is based on performing redressing actions or relying on the avoidance of directness (McCarten, 2007, p. 12). Examples in this regard are "like", "I guess/think", "I/we do not know", "I do not think", "to be honest", etc. (O'Keeffe et al., 2007, pp. 73–74, 174ff; McCarthy and Carter, 2019, pp. 45–46; McCarthy and McCarten, 2019, p. 8). Implicating is a hedging strategy and a way to manifest shared values. The discourse marker "you know" may also imply shared values and satisfy positive face wants (O'Keeffe et al., 2007, pp. 34, 72–75; McCarthy and Carter, 2019, pp. 44). Conversely, amongst others, "I mean" is used when shared knowledge is not inferred (O'Keeffe et al., 2007, p. 72; McCarthy and Carter, 2019, p. 44). The expression "you see" is a monitoring device, as the speaker

implies that the other conversation participant does not know what s/he is about to say (McCarten, 2007, p. 11). Vagueness and approximation can be positive and negative face-saving tools, because they rely on shared values but, at the same time, they can stress boundaries. Some vague expressions are, for instance, "a kind/sort of", "that sort/kind (of)", and "a bit" (O'Keeffe et al., 2007, pp. 74–75, 174; McCarthy and McCarten, 2019, p. 8).

2.1.1 Discourse markers

The examples provided above revolve around discourse markers and are sourced from the literature and scholarly research. This paper aims to provide corpus-based examples of discourse markers used in legal institutional contexts.

Discourse markers, also defined as "gambits" (House and Rehbein, 2001, p. 101), play a crucial role in spoken conversation. According to House and Rehbein (2004), they are intertwined with the speech context in which they are uttered and function "as a means of intervening into acts of negotiation" (House and Rehbein, 2001, p. 101) among conversation participants. They generally occur at discourse transition places, i.e., in the right or left periphery of sentences or statements. Their function is mainly to connect and link different pieces of discourse (ibid.).

According to O'Keeffe et al. (2007, p. 39), in fact, discourse markers are aimed at organizing and monitoring conversations. Namely, they mark opening, closing, interrupted talks, and changed or diverted topics. Jucker and Ziv (1998) describe such functions as text-structuring (ibid., p. 4). Furthermore, the authors argue that discourse markers also serve other purposes, which are attitudinal, cognitive and interactional. As a matter of fact, O'Keeffe et al. (2007) posit that discourse markers may have little lexical content, although they are highly empowering, as they allow interactants to participate actively in a conversation. There are different types of discourse markers, ranging from non-words (such as "er" or "hmm", O'Keeffe et al., 2007, pp. 141–142; Giampieri, 2025b) to multi-words or non-minimal response tokens (e.g., "is that so?", O'Keeffe et al. 2007, pp. 143–145; Giampieri, 2025b).

Several researchers have studied the relevance of discourse markers in institutional and non-institutional contexts. Furko (2017), for example, finds that pragmatic markers (i.e., multi-words with pragmatic functions) often serve different manipulative purposes in political discourse, such as polarization, suppression, conversationalization, recontextualization, and ambiguity. At the same time, any manipulative intent can be pursued by using diverse pragmatic markers. Banguis-Bantawig (2019) analyses Asian presidential discourse and highlights that cataphoric markers are hardly ever used, whereas discourse markers which add or substitute information are uttered the most. Fu et al. (2024) investigate the use and frequencies of "you know" and "I mean" in Chinese and British political TV interviews. The authors reveal that "you know" is mentioned more extensively in both circumstances, where it functions as hedging and highlights sharedness. Conversely, "I mean" is mostly uttered as a

reformulation device. Additionally, the authors find that Chinese interviewers pronounce "you know" more often, probably with a view to engaging the audience. Conversely, British interviewers use "I mean" prevalently, thus rephrasing statements for precision and accuracy.

2.1.2 Institutional and non-institutional contexts

According to Freed (2015, p. 809), institutional discourse takes place in spoken interactions when the following conditions are met: 1) at least one conversation participant represents an institution; 2) the communicants' purposes are dictated by the institution they speak for, and 3) at least one of them considers the conversation as work-related (see also Sarangi and Roberts, 1999).

Karasik and Gillespie (2014) posit that institutional discourse is necessary and effective to organize society on the basis of the functions its members carry out. The authors distinguish between agents and clients. The former represent institutions and impart rules and/or provide recommendations. The latter follow the agents' instructions (ibid., p. 27). Therefore, institutional discourse is grounded in a hierarchical division of tasks and powers. In this respect, Immergut (2009) explains that institutions and policies are strictly related; the former constantly changes the latter, which, in turn, change people's perceptions of institutions.

Constraints in institutional discourse can be purpose- or non-purpose-related (Herijgers and Maat, 2017). The former rely on explaining and/or convincing, whereas the latter are related to politeness and/or efficiency (Herijgers and Maat, 2017, p. 274). It is evident that such constraints call for the development of specific conversation and communication skills (ibid.).

Conversely, non-institutional discourse is mostly work-unrelated and does not imply any form of hierarchy amongst the interactants (Pervukhina and Churikov, 2021). Non-institutional discourse can be influenced by informal constraints which are imposed by the society at large. Societal rules, however, do not strictly or always impinge on people's immediate choices (North, 1990, pp. 36–45).

Additionally, in institutional contexts such as the legal one, discourse is constrained by formulae and rituals (Tiersma, 1999; Giampieri, 2025a). Formulaicity is a well-known feature of both oral and written legal communication. For this reason, it has been the object of accurate scholarly research (Tiersma, 1999; Pontrandolfo, 2023; Giampieri, 2025a). For example, Pontrandolfo (2023, p. 126) distinguishes between "legal phraseology" and "phraseology in legal language". The former includes word patterning applying specific legal principles and producing legal effects, whereas the latter refers to multi-words which do not have direct legal implications and are used for explanation and limitation purposes. An instance of "legal phraseology" is "dismiss the appeal", and a sample of "phraseology in legal language" is "without prejudice to". The term "phraseology in legal language" is also referred to as "general (legal) formulae", which are investigated in detail by Giampieri (2025a) in an array of written and oral contexts across different languages (e.g., English, Italian, and French

online terms of service; national and EU law on consumer contracts; and national and European parliamentary proceedings). Despite being "general", legal formulae follow distinct patterns which make them distinguishable from other categories and field-related multi-words (Giampieri, 2025a).

2.2 (Im/)politeness in courtrooms

Courtroom talks are notoriously "impolite" (Culpeper, 1996, p. 364), as they are carried out by following "minimal politeness" strategies (Tracy, 2011, p. 124). Court-related behaviours, in fact, are face-threatening (Wright et al., 2022) and are characterized by "intentional face attacks" (Archer, 2011, p. 3217) towards less powerful participants. There are recurrent disagreements and legal arguments (Wright et al., 2022). As posited by Tracy (2011, p. 129) "disagreements are done straightforwardly with little hedging or the other kinds of conversational work". For these reasons, conflict is systematic in courts (Harris, 2011, p. 86). In cross-examinations, for instance, witnesses' claims are always highly disputed and controverted by lawyers (Tracy, 2011, p. 124), who are actually just performing their job (Archer, 2011). Indeed, lawyers carry out different ambiguous tasks (Archer, 2011), which, amongst others, are related to the facework occurring in cross-examinations and examinations-in-chief. In the former, face-aggravating questions are generally posed, because lawyers need to prove the witness's guilt (Liu and Hale, 2017, p. 75). In the latter, face-enhancing techniques are put into place (Harris, 2011, pp. 96, 104), since lawyers aim at demonstrating the witness's innocence.

On the other hand, powerful participants must abide by the standards of institutional and professional courtesy (Wright et al., 2022). For example, in England and Wales most judges are addressed as "My Lord/Lady". Such forms of address are imposed by codes of conduct and are aimed at safeguarding the solemnity of court proceedings (Wright et al., 2022). Hence, lawyers, judges, and justices make efforts to act impersonally and professionally (Tracy, 2011, p. 129) while performing the business of law (Tracy, 2011, p. 124; Wright et al., 2022). The institutional context, thus, heavily influences facework and behaviours (Sanderson, 1995, pp. 15–19; Tracy, 2020, p. 268). For example, Boginskaya (2024) finds that boosters are frequent in courtroom speech as they denote the professional pragmatic competence of lawyers, especially as regards the credibility and reliability of the information provided. Tracy (2020, p. 258), in fact, posits that "judges and attorneys do significant discursive work to show that the law is shaping what they say".

For these reasons, it is argued that the (im/)politeness theories developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Culpeper (1996) are not applicable in courtrooms (Wright et al., 2022; Archer, 2011; Tracy, 2011), as "participants are legally licensed to aggravate the face of other participants because of their role" (Archer, 2008, p. 182). In this regard, Penman (1990) finds that both face-saving and face-threatening acts are deployed in courts, and they are systematic

and legally sanctioned (Harris, 2011, p. 86). Sanderson (1996) claims that it is the institutional context where discourse is carried out that makes standard politeness theories outdated.

In light of the above, Archer (2011) describes facework in court as non-polite, rather than impolite (see also Lakoff, 1989). In a more recent work, Archer (2017) argues that there is actually no dichotomy between politeness and impoliteness, but a continuum, where different levels and types of (im/non-)politeness take place on the basis of the activities and discourses carried out.

Therefore, scholars claim that in the courtroom, facework and politeness are not synonymous (Archer, 2011; Tracy, 2011), as face-aggravation is part of a lawyer's job (Archer, 2011) and powerless participants must yield to institutional obligations (Wright et al., 2022). In light of the above, researchers state that courtroom discourse and political talk follow certain ritual patterns. More precisely, they may serve both professional and media discourse functions. Namely, there is a symbiotic relationship between political discourse and the media through which political information, beliefs, and opinions are conveyed and shaped (Fetzer 2016).

In the same way, (im)politeness can be conveyed by following rituals, especially in institutionalized contexts (Kádár and House 2021). Kádár and House (2021) underscore the relevance of interaction ritual theory in the study of (im)politeness. They provide an overview of the main features of pragmatics and research analyses in interaction ritual. To do so, they present a case study displaying the connection between institutional aggressive behaviour and ritual by leveraging on the concept of ritual frame.

2.3 Languaging and politeness in supreme courts

Supreme court justices are the highest ranked judges, who are called on to rule on controversial issues (Tracy, 2020, p. 258). Their judgments influence public opinion and show what is constitutionally acceptable (Vass, 2004, p. 133). The society at large expects supreme courts to be fair and provide the best answers on highly disputed matters (Vass, 2004, p. 136). At the same time, society assumes that their decisions are objective.

Most supreme court justices follow standard politeness-face codes and behaviours (Tracy, 2020, p. 267), which are aimed at saving the face of the institution they represent.

At the European level, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) is the highest-ranked court, whose judgments are binding across all European Member States and individuals (Harmsen and McAuliffe, 2015). The ECJ hears and decides on cases regarding the breach of EU law and on questions related to its interpretation (Trklja and McAuliffe, 2019).

Several scholars have focused on the languaging and politeness strategies developed by the justices of supreme courts and of the ECJ (Vass, 2004; Trklja and McAuliffe, 2019; Wright et al., 2022). Vass (2004) investigates hedging (i.e., mitigation) strategies in two different legal genres: US Supreme Court opinions and American law review articles. The author posits that

the Supreme Court's argumentations tend to exclude words denoting indetermination or modulation, such as "allegedly", "presumably", or "suggest" (Vass, 2004, p. 136). On the contrary, agreement and disagreement are expressed directly and with little hedging (Vass, 2004, p. 139). Nonetheless, Supreme Court justices often resort to hedging devices to mitigate or anticipate possible counter-argumentations and reinforce their position (Vass, 2004, p. 138). In this way, they develop institutional face-saving strategies. An example is the following: "Although we have no cause to doubt respondents' assertion (…) we fail to see (…)" (Vass, 2004, p. 138). Alternatively, they may restrict the scope of their argumentations with introductory phrases such as "for the purposes of this appeal" (Vass, 2004, p. 137). Trklja and McAuliffe (2019) analyse the formulae in the judgments of the ECJ and of the UK Supreme Court. They argue that the language of the former is generally more formulaic than the language of the latter and it appears almost automized (Trklja and McAuliffe, 2019, p. 50). Also, many formulae are found at the beginning of paragraphs and their distribution in the text is related to the metadiscourse strategies pursued. This inevitably influences and reflects the method of reasoning of the judges of the ECJ. Wright et al. (2022) focus on the lemma "respect" and the manners in which it is used in UK Supreme Court judgments. They find many recurrent clusters, such as "my respectful submission", "we respectfully submit", "I may respectfully say so", "with respect", and so on. The authors posit that the lemma "respect" can serve a variety of different purposes, such as displaying the lawyers' professional identity, lessening potential face aggravation (especially when disagreeing with judges) and, at the same time, aggravating face-threats and showing disrespect implicitly.

3 Methodology

As mentioned, (im/)politeness strategies are explored in corpora composed of the judgments and opinions of the UK and US supreme courts, and of the ECJ.

The judgments by the UK Supreme Court are consulted from a sub-section of the Corpus of Contemporary English Legal Decisions (CoCELD) (Rodríguez-Puente and Hernández-Coalla, 2022). The CoCELD contains the case law produced within the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth between, 1950 and 2021. It is divided into two subcorpora, one for the Privy Council Decisions and another for the House of Lords and the Supreme Court Decisions. For the purposes of this paper, the House of Lords and UK Supreme Court subcorpus is considered. It consists of almost 370,000 words.

The Corpus of US Supreme Court Opinions (SCOTUS) (Davies, 2017) is composed of texts sourced from the FindLaw.com and Justia.com databases, containing the opinions issued by the US Supreme Court from 1790s to 2010s. It comprises almost 130 million words.

The Eur-Lex judgments parallel corpus (Baisa et al., 2016) is a multilingual corpus in all the official languages of the European Union focused only on judgments of the Court of Justice. It is, hence, a subset of the whole EUR-Lex corpus. The English sub-corpus of the ECJ's

judgments is composed of over 42 million words. For the purpose of this paper, the ECJ corpus is abbreviated ECJC.

The following politeness strategies and multi-words are investigated in the three corpora above mentioned:

1) sharedness or references to common ground (the following phrases are searched for in the corpora: “you know”, “as we know”);
2) reformulations implying that sharedness is not inferred (“I mean”);
3) new information devices (“you see”, “you can see”);
4) depersonalization tokens (“they say”, “they assume/suppose”);
5) stance softeners via hedged expressions or adverbs (“I/we think”, “I/we do not think”, “I/we do not know”, “I/we suppose”, “I/we assume”, “I/we suggest”, “to be honest”, “allegedly”, “presumably”, “supposedly”);
6) restrictions of the scope of the argumentation (“for (the) purpose(s) of the / this appeal”);
7) approximation (“a bit”, “(that) kind of”, “(that) sort of”);
8) boosters (by using contrastive or concessive connectives) (“it is true that... however/but”, “although we....”, “right... however/but”);
9) ritual deference (“respectful”, “respectfully”, “with (great / the greatest) respect”, “my Lord(s)/Lady”, “your/his Lordship(s)”); and
10) conventional politeness (“please”, “thank you”).

The above expressions are searched for in each corpus and relative frequencies are compared. The relative frequencies are calculated per million words. Sample statements are extracted from the corpora to allow for the better comprehension of the multi-words in context, and the (im/)politeness strategies followed.

4 Analysis

This section discusses the relative frequencies (RF) of the expressions above mentioned. The multi-words are reported in tables where RF are calculated for each corpus. As indicated, RF are calculated per million words. Sample statements are also displayed.

4.1 Sharedness or references to common ground

The first (positive) politeness strategies investigated are sharedness markers; in particular, the expressions “you know” and “as we know” (O’Keeffe et al., 2007, pp. 34, 72, 74–75; McCarthy and Carter, 2019, p. 44). In the search for “you know”, expressions such as “do/did you know” are eschewed. The highest RFs per multi-word are marked in bold.

Table 1. Relative frequencies of "you know" and "as we know" in the three corpora

Expressions	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
You know	**5.45**	4.35	0.12
As we know	**5.45**	1.54	0.00

As shown in Table 1, both "you know" and "as we know" appear more frequently in CoCELD. It is also evident that ECJC does not feature high recurrence rates of the sharedness markers of this type. Sample statements ("SS") sourced from the three corpora are as follows:

SS1: "The need of the individual will be assessed against the standards of civilised society as we know them in the United Kingdom",
SS2: "Finally, you know better than I do the critical circumstances of the day", and
SS3: "As you know perhaps, there has recently been a decision of the Court of First Instance". Although limited, the statements above show that "you know" is used not only to elicit shared values, but also to show deference and engage in facework, as SS2 shows ("you know better than I do").

4.2 Reformulation devices

This section explores "I mean" as a reformulation device implying that sharedness is not inferred (O'Keeffe et al., 2007, p. 72; McCarthy and Carter, 2019, p. 44).

Table 2. Relative frequencies of "I mean" in the three corpora

Expression	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
I mean	**2.72**	2.43	0.00

The expression "I mean" has almost the same RF in CoCELD and SCOTUS, whereas ECJC does not generate any occurrence. Sample statements ("SS") are as follows:

SS1: "By 'crimes of basic intent' I mean those crimes whose definition expresses (or, more often, implies) a *mens rea*";
SS2: "I never saw him take away any of the property; I mean, saw him sell any";
SS3: "In saying this, I mean to state that I never even spoke to (…) on the subject";
SS4: "I would not take it across – yes, I mean it was not prudent"; and
SS5: "I mean to insist".

The finite "I mean" clearly functions as a reformulation and an explanation token. In some cases, however, it is also used to reveal and remark one's stance (as in SS4 and SS5).

4.3 New-information tokens

This section analyses the expressions "you see" and "you can see" as negative politeness markers bringing out new information and discontinuities among conversation participants (Szczyrbak, 2019; Wright et al., 2022).

Table 3. Relative frequencies of "you see" and "you can see" in the three corpora

Expressions	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
You see	0.00	**1.17**	0.02
You can see	0.00	**0.16**	0.05

As can be observed, "you see" and "you can see" are not particularly recurrent across the corpora, although the highest frequencies are in SCOTUS. Sample statements are the following ones:

SS1: "You see, what this plan proposes is a division of the country";
SS2: "You see, it's none of your business whether it creates in your judgment a false impression or not";
SS3: "As you see the notification to XX of the names of firms which up till now have bought from us has considerable disadvantages";
SS4: "As you can see, my directorate is very well represented by women"; and
SS5: "You can see that the attitude of XX has not changed".

By analysing "you can see" and "as you see" more in depth, it becomes apparent that they also function as persuasive markers rather than as merely bringing new information into the conversation (McCarten, 2007, p. 2). In addition, in SS2 it is evident that despite the initial politeness marker "you see", the Court goes "bald on record" without performing any FTA. As a consequence, the expression "it's none of your business" is uttered. Therefore, SS2 could be considered as featuring negative impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996), or a rather abrupt statement.

The argumentation above confirms literature findings, i.e., the fact that expressions composed of the discourse marker "you see" function as linguistic resources which exercise control over the interactants (O'Keeffe et al., 2007, p. 39; Giampieri, 2025b). In this way, "you see" is not only a shared knowledge device which relies on politeness (McCarthy and Carter, 2019, p. 44), but it can also act as a marker of impoliteness.

4.4 Depersonalization

This section focuses on negative politeness strategies highlighting differences and boundaries. More precisely, the following depersonalization tokens are dealt with: "they say" and "they assume/suppose" (Vass, 2004, p. 131).

Table 4. Relative frequencies of "they say" and "they assume/suppose" in the three corpora

Expressions	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
They say	**24.51**	7.58	0.78
They assume/suppose	0.00	**0.92**	0.45

The expression "they say" mostly appears in CoCELD, whereas "they assume/suppose" is infrequent across the corpora. ECJC produces the lowest frequencies of "they say". Corpus-sourced sample statements are as follows:

SS1: "They say the tribunal erred in refusing to hear evidence of the respondent's conduct";
SS2: "Admittedly they did not warn the Respondent but, as the Respondent knew all the facts when she left the house, they say that giving a warning to her was unnecessary".
SS3: "They assume that Article 25(1) of Regulation No 1408/71 does not in this case entitle him to continue to receive benefits"; and
SS4: "They suppose that this Court placed its former decision upon the ground mainly that XX purchased the bonds".

In SS2, "they say" is used to provide information on the case brought before the court. Therefore, it does not only mark boundaries between other people's comments and one's own, but it also describes elements or facts of the case, or its course. For instance, it can refer to lower courts' decisions (see SS1, SS2, and SS3).

4.5 Stance softeners

This section deals with stance softeners evidenced by hedged expressions or adverbs such as "I/we think", "I/we do not think", "I/we do not know", "I/we suppose", "I/we assume", "I/we suggest", "to be honest", "allegedly", "presumably", and "supposedly" (Vass, 2004, pp. 131, 136–137; O'Keeffe et al., 2007, pp. 73–74; McCarthy and Carter, 2019, pp. 45–46).

Table 5. Relative frequencies of stance softeners in the three corpora

Expressions	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
I think	443.94	**763.60**	0.02
We think	24.51	**147.45**	0.00
I do not think	**125.28**	8.03	0.05
We do not think	0.00	**17.38**	0.02
I do not know	**13.62**	2.26	0.00
We do not know	**10.89**	2.99	0.00
I suppose	**5.45**	3.67	0.00
We suppose	0.00	**2.22**	0.00
I assume	2.72	**12.08**	0.00
We assume	0.00	**3.11**	0.02
I suggest	**8.17**	1.29	0.07
We suggest	0.00	**0.49**	0.05
In my view	**209.71**	34.86	0.02
To be honest	0.00	**0.20**	0.00
Allegedly	0.00	28.45	**32.29**
Presumably	**32.68**	26.87	0.14
Supposedly	0.00	**2.88**	1.84

As observable, the occurrences of stance softeners vary across the corpora. For instance, "I do not think", "I/we do not know", "I suppose/suggest", and "in my view" are more recurrent in CoCELD. On the contrary, "I/we think", "we suppose/suggest", "I/we assume", "to be honest" and "supposedly" mostly appear in SCOTUS. Therefore, hedged strategies are deployed in varied ways in CoCELD and SCOTUS. The softener "allegedly" is the only stance softener prevailing in ECJC. Sample statements are the following ones:

SS1: "I think that the premise is open to doubt";
SS2: "But we think otherwise";
SS3: "I do not think it was incumbent upon the employers' representatives to take this course";
SS4: "We do not know whether there would have been any practical difficulty in doing this";
SS5: "Then, I suppose, it can not be called a result effected by accidental means";

SS6: "We assume that it was not possible to take out patents for all these inventions";
SS7: "To be honest, we do not know";
SS8: "It is not, and, I suggest, the Lord President plainly speaks in a way which shows that he regards that action as one still open in the proper circumstances";
SS9: "We suggest his interrogation be deferred";
SS10: "Nowhere did we suggest that the 'constitutionally protected liberty interest' in avoiding physical confinement (…) was conceptually different from the liberty interest of citizens".
SS11: "This appeal must accordingly, in my view, be dismissed";
SS12: "This cannot be affected by provisions of national law which allegedly exclude its jurisdiction";
SS13: "It is a principle, presumably based on public policy and public interest"; and
SS14: "Which supposedly result from a two-month career break".

Hedging strategies clearly come to the fore in the language samples provided above, especially when manifesting nuanced stances (see, for example SS1 and SS2: "I think that the premise is open to doubt" and "But we think otherwise"). In some cases, conversely, stances are quite direct, as in SS10 ("Nowhere did we suggest that...").

4.6 Scope restriction

The restriction of the scope of an argumentation is an institutional face-saving strategy (Vass, 2004). It is analysed by exploring the expression "for (the) purpose(s) of the / this appeal" (Vass, 2004, p. 137).

Table 6. Relative frequencies of "for (the) purpose(s) of the/this appeal" in the three corpora

Expression	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
For (the) purpose(s) of the/this appeal	**13.62**	0.39	0.28

In Table 6, it is evident that scope restriction expressed by "for (the) purpose(s) of the/this appeal" is more frequent in CoCELD. Sample statements are as follows:

SS1: "For the purposes of this appeal, it has to be assumed that the factual basis for these allegations (…) is correct";
SS2: "For the purposes of the appeal, it is expedient to examine first the second ground of appeal, which concerns the judgment under appeal in so far as it declared certain other claims for compensation inadmissible"; and
SS3: "It is unnecessary therefore for the purposes of this appeal to repeat any of the detailed background history".

As can be understood, "for the purpose(s) of the/this appeal" also serves as an approximation tool and, hence, it can take or give certain information for granted (see SS3).

4.7 Approximation

The vague expressions focused on in this paper are the following ones: "a bit", "(that) kind of", and "(that) sort of" because they have been addressed extensively in scholarly research (O'Keeffe et al., 2007, pp. 72–75; McCarthy and Carter, 2019, pp. 44–46; Giampieri, 2025b).

Table 7. Relative frequencies of "a bit", "(that) kind of", and "(that) sort of" in the three corpora

Expressions	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
A bit	**2.72**	0.99	0.05
(That) kind of	**103.49**	65.68	41.43
(That) sort of	**35.41**	27.66	2.48

Table 7 clearly shows that approximation prevails in CoCELD, given that all the above-mentioned multi-words appear more frequently in this corpus. Corpus-sourced sample statements are as follows:

SS1: (quoting an annex) "We would like to ask you to wait a bit before getting offers from us";
SS2: "The majority's assertion, however, is a bit of an overstatement";
SS3: "Not a bit. The discussion simply points out what XX plainly said: (...)";
SS4: "May a Member State apply any kind of restriction or exclusion to that directive?";
SS5: "This kind of assessment, artificial though it may be, nevertheless calls for consideration of a number of highly speculative factors";
SS6: "It can prohibit the use of any kind of wagons";
SS7: "That sort of restructuring will be organised within a group of companies so that the losses are taken into account in the Member States"; and
SS8: "This sort of proceeding against personal property is unknown to the common law".

In the statements above, "a bit" is not only a vague category marker, but also a hedging device. Namely, it softens stances, as in SS2 ("a bit of an overstatement"), or it expresses them clearly (SS3; "not a bit"). The multi-words "(that) kind of" and "(that) sort of", conversely, are mainly used as approximators. In particular, they refer to something already expressed and help reduce the speaking time. Therefore, they may not only function as vagueness markers, but also as cohesive and deictic elements (see SS5, SS7 and SS8). Additionally, they act on the hedging strategies of the noun phrase following them, which becomes less fuzzy (Fetzer, 2009).

4.8 Boosters

This section examines the following concessive or contrastive expressions: "it is true that... however/but", "although we....", and "is/are right... however/but" (Vass, 2004). In this respect, Vass (2004, p. 138) posits that the above statements are actually both hedges and boosters, despite containing concessive or contrastive markers (e.g., "but", "however"). This sub-section clarifies the reasons why.

Table 8. Relative frequencies of boosters in the three corpora

Expressions	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
It is true that... however/but	**5.45**	0.71	1.06
Although we...	0.00	**10.14**	0.05
Is/are right... however/but	**5.45**	0.77	0.05

The multi-words reported in Table 8 are apparently not particularly recurrent in ECJC, whereas they appear more frequently in CoCELD and SCOTUS. Sample statements are as follows:

SS1: "It is true that no oral argument was permitted. However, having come to the conclusion that the case had no merit, the court had to put a stop to the review proceeding";
SS2: "It is true that such a purpose is an economic objective, but it has not been shown that that purpose corresponds to the overall logic of the tax system in force";
SS3: "Although we have no say in the matter, we agree to adopt the prices of the Paris consortium";
SS4: "The OHIM Board of Appeal was right to take that consideration into account. However, in the contested judgment, the Court of First Instance did not, or did not sufficiently, take account of the nature of the mark when assessing its distinctive character"; and
SS5: "That is right, of course, but only at an uninformative level of generality".

It can be appreciated that the statements above contain both boosters and hedges, which highlight the righteousness of some actions or opinions and, at the same time, they express stances in a softened manner. This means that, despite being composed of concessive or contrastive connectives (i.e., "however" or "but"), the multi-words above are aimed at intensifying and emphasizing the strength of an underlying statement. For these reasons, distinguishing between hedges and boosters is not always straightforward (Silver, 2003; Vass, 2004).

4.9 Ritual deference

The following words and phrases express ritual deference: "respectful", "respectfully", "with (great / the greatest) respect", "my Lord(s)/Lady", and "your/his Lordship(s)" (Csulich, 2016; Wright et al., 2022). Furthermore, they can premodify impoliteness moves.

Table 9. Relative frequencies of ritual deference markers in the three corpora

Expressions	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
Respectful	**13.62**	2.46	0.05
Respectfully	16.34	**23.80**	0.05
With respect	46.30	**176.41**	72.58
With great respect	**8.17**	0.42	0.00
With the greatest respect	**2.72**	0.06	0.00
My Lord(s)	**640.03**	0.42	0.00
My Lady/Ladies	0.00	0.00	0.00
Your Lordship(s)	**386.74**	0.64	0.00
His Lordship(s)	**59.92**	0.71	0.00

It can be observed that ritual deference is mostly expressed via "my Lord(s)" and "your/his Lordship(s)" in CoCELD. In SCOTUS, conversely, "respectfully" and "with respect" are more frequent. In ECJC no such forms of deference are used, except for "with respect". This phrase, however, is not a deference token, but a syntactical device, meaning "with regard to". This was also noticed by Coulthard and Johnson (2007, p. 44), although their analysis concerned contracts. In addition, as can be seen, the form of address "my Lady" is absent in all corpora, thus revealing non-gender-neutral language. Sample statements are as follows:

SS1: Also, with respect to the special consumption tax, it seems that imported products alone are made to bear, (…), ancillary costs"
SS2: "With respect to low-capacity SBM machines";
SS3: "With respect, I am unable to follow or accept this reasoning or its result";
SS4: "With great respect, it seems to me that the opinions in both the present cases err";
SS5: "I am in respectful agreement with it";
SS6: "My Lords, I have to say respectfully that I do not know what Parliament intended to do";
SS7: "My Lords, I am so fully in agreement with what was said";
SS8: "But my doubts, though substantial and subsisting, are not sufficient to compel me to dissent from the conclusion arrived at by the majority of your Lordships", and

SS9: "His Lordship discussed the evidence on this matter".

As already explained, "with respect" is not only used as a deference token (see SS3), but also as a syntactical cohesive device, being a synonym of "with regard to" (see SS1 and SS2). In all other instances, ritual deference acts as a form of agreement (see SS5) or disagreement (see SS3 and SS4). Moreover, it tends to address the members of the Court (see from SS6 to SS9). Nonetheless, the above speech strategies could also anticipate (positive) impoliteness (see SS3).

4.10 Conventional politeness

The last elements that this paper analyses are conventional politeness tokens such as "please" and "thank you" (Harris, 2011, p. 87).

Table 10. Relative frequencies of "please" and "thank you" in the three corpora

Expressions	CoCELD RF	SCOTUS RF	ECJC RF
Please	**16.34**	9.14	0.99
Thank you	0.00	**1.02**	0.17

Apparently, "please" is more frequent in CoCELD, whereas "thank you" in SCOTUS. In all corpora, however, both "please" and "thank you" are mostly used in quotations from business correspondence or conversation transcripts, as shown in the sample statements below:

SS1: "She added 'they will want to call you back so please keep your phone free'";
SS2: "Please refer to previous footnotes";
SS3: "If accepted, please let us know the amount of stamp duties";
SS4: "In the tape recording, petitioner states: (…) 'you did it. You fired me. What am I supposed to do: thank you? Be grateful to you?'";
SS5: "Thank you for your letter of 22 December 2004";
SS6: "Then that clarifies it for me, Mr. Chairman. I thank you."

As can be seen, only SS6 reports an instance of spontaneous (i.e., not rehearsed by the reading of documents) and conventional politeness in court.

5 Discussion

The investigations carried out in the sections above bring to the fore a different distribution in the relative frequencies of the politeness and discourse markers. They also reveal diverse pragmatic strategies, often served by the same (or similar) categories of multi-words. The next sections present quantitative and qualitative considerations on the basis of the data gathered.

5.1 Quantitative considerations

As far as the sharedness markers "you know" and "as we know" are concerned, CoCELD shows the highest frequencies of both. The investigation above also points to the fact that "you know" is used not only to elicit shared knowledge (i.e., as a positive politeness marker), but also to show deference (namely, as a negative politeness element), as in the expression "you know better than I do".

The reformulation device "I mean" is almost equally featured in CoCELD and SCOTUS, although it is actually mentioned to reveal or remark one's stance, as in the phrase "I mean to insist".

The new-information token "you (can) see" appears the most in SCOTUS, whereas it is absent in CoCELD, and is practically unmentioned in ECJC. It can function as a persuasive tool, rather than as an element that brings new information into the conversation. This is visible in statements such as "you can see that the attitude of XX has not changed". Apparently, it also expresses (negative) impoliteness or an abrupt opinion, especially in statements such as "you see, it's none of your business".

The depersonalization expression "they say" mostly occurs in CoCELD, whereas "they assume/suppose" appears in SCOTUS and ECJC. By analysing the contexts where "they say" is used, it is evident that it does not only bring other people's divergent opinions to the fore, but it is also used to describe elements or facts of the dispute (for example, when referring to lower courts' decisions). In this sense, "they say" can be considered as a cohesive device. At the same time, it addresses negative face wants.

Stance softeners such as "I/we think", "I/we suggest", "in my view", "to be honest", "allegedly" are almost evenly distributed between CoCELD and SCOTUS. Conversely, ECJC only shows marked instances of "allegedly". In this case, it has been highlighted that such hedged expressions can also serve as direct stance markers, especially in negative phrases such as "nowhere did we suggest that...".

Restricting the scope of an argumentation is another politeness strategy adopted by justices, particularly in CoCELD. The phrase "for (the) purpose(s) of the/this appeal" also functions as an approximator. In this case, it is aimed at taking or giving some information for granted. A clear example is the statement "it is unnecessary therefore for the purposes of this appeal to repeat any of the detailed background history".

On the other hand, other approximation tools (which abound in CoCELD) are used as hedges when expressing a different opinion (as in "a bit of an overstatement"), or as stance tools (as in "not a bit"). Alternatively (as in the case of "kind / sort of"), vague expressions assume a cohesive deictic function when referring to things or facts already mentioned, as in the statements "this kind of assessment (…) calls for consideration", or "this sort of proceeding against personal property". It can also be argued that the use of demonstrative adjectives

(more precisely, in phrases of the type "this kind/sort of") render the noun phrases which follow as less-fuzzy hedges (Fetzer, 2009).

Boosters of the type "it is true that... however" and "(...) is/are right... but" abound in CoCELD, whereas expressions such as "although we..." are more recurrent in SCOTUS. As evidenced in the literature (Vass, 2004), these phrases are both boosters and hedges, as they express the righteousness of an opinion and, at the same time, they are (nuanced) stances (as in "but we think otherwise").

Ritual deference relying on words or expressions such as "respectful(ly)", and "with (great / the greatest) respect" and on forms of address such as "my Lord(s)", and "your/his Lordship(s)" mostly appear in CoCELD. Exceptions are "respectfully" and "with respect" which are particularly frequent in SCOTUS. However, the analysis also reveals that "with respect" is a syntactical cohesive device (meaning "with regard to"), rather than a deference token. Also, manners of address are mainly gender-biased, as there are no instances of "my Lady/Ladies" in the three corpora.

Finally, courtroom conventional politeness such as "please" and "thank you" mainly occur in CoCELD and SCOTUS, although they are quotations from business correspondence or (telephone) conversation transcripts. Therefore, they cannot be considered as strictly pertaining to courtroom speech or judges' discourse.

5.2 Qualitative considerations

This sub-section aims at displaying and commenting on some sample discourse sourced from the corpora. By doing so, a qualitative assessment is carried out. Extracts are reported in tables, where particular words or expressions are underlined and further analysed.

Example (1) reports the first excerpt sourced from CoCELD, where a barrister is taking the floor and providing explanations.

(1) And there is another factor which I fear might operate in a much greater number of cases. Every counsel in practice knows that daily he is faced with the question whether in his client's interest he should raise a new issue, put another witness in the box, or ask further questions of the witness whom he is examining or cross-examining. That is seldom an easy question but I think that most experienced counsel would agree that the golden rule is – when in doubt stop. Far more cases have been lost by going on too long than by stopping too soon.

In (1), the finite "I fear" functions as both a sympathizer token and a hedging device while the speaker is expressing a personal opinion. The comparative "much greater" is a booster, as it supports the speaker's stance. It conveys the fact that if justices (or peers) do not follow the barrister's advice, the factor described could become more challenging or impinge on a growing number of situations. The expression "in practice (knows)" acts as a sharedness token

and a hedging strategy relying on common values. The barrister, in fact, assumes that what s/he is about to say is known by his/her peers. The phrase "the box" also relies on shared knowledge, as it refers to the witnesses' box, i.e., a courtroom designated area where witnesses sit or stand to give testimony. The statement "that is seldom an easy question" is a booster, as it supports the barrister's opinions expressed in the previous lines. At the same time, it is a form of hedging which lays the ground for the following contrasting idea. As a matter of fact, the booster is followed by the contrastive connective "but". To further mitigate the barrister's dissent, the speaker uses a stance softener ("I think") and a hedging device relying on peer solidarity ("most experienced counsel would agree that"). The noun phrase "golden rule" states something that should be obvious to the lawyers' category; therefore, it functions as a sharedness device grounded in common knowledge. The extract above ends with a booster which supports the barrister's point of view ("far more cases (…)"). Lastly, it should be pointed out that the barrister uses gender-biased language, assuming that higher court lawyers are only male figures ("he", "his"). However "he/him/his" was traditionally used as a gender-neutral pronoun or determiner. Example (2) focuses on an extract retrieved from ECJC.

(2) In this instance, the Commission adopted the contested decision not in the light of considerations of expediency or political choice the upholding of which it allegedly sought by usurping a role as 'third branch' of the EU legislature, but on the ground that the act which the co-legislators were minded to adopt constituted a distortion of its proposal for a framework regulation and involved serious interference with the institutional balance.

The excerpt above clearly contains words expressing stance and a strong criticism towards the Commission's decision. Such a critique is evidently conveyed by noun phrases or nominalization (i.e., "contested decision", "distortion of its proposal", and "serious interference"), and verb phrases ("allegedly sought" and "usurping a role"). The content of (2) leaves no doubt as regards the manifest opposition to the Commission's conduct. As can be understood, "allegedly" does not function as a stance softener (see Table 5) in the case in point. Conversely, the adverb carries a negative connotation and implies misconduct ("usurping a role") and/or carelessness ("not in light of considerations of expediency or political choice"). The words and phrases underlined in (2) above are instances of (negative) impoliteness focusing on the (negative) face wants of the addressee. Example (3) reports and extract from SCOTUS.

(3) I respectfully urge that the New Mexico suit be brought and pressed, since the record now before the Supreme Court fails to disclose the full case of the government. But in any event, I deem it essential to the interests of the government to urge reargument in the present case, as even with the imperfect record it is my opinion that weighty and

> sufficient reasons can be brought to the notice of the Court to justify a review of its decision or a remand for rehearing upon the merits of the case. I am also assured that, if agreeable to yourself and the Honorable Attorney General, the Hon. Benjamin XXX, with whom Commissioner YYY has conferred upon the legal points involved in the case, can be engaged, upon terms satisfactory to the Department of Justice, to file a brief in support of the motion for reargument, and I respectfully suggest that General XXX's services be availed of. If you so desire, General XXX will wait upon you at any time you may indicate to consult you in the matter, and will lay before you the newly discovered evidences referred to, which are in his possession.

The excerpt above refers to a motion for rehearing and contains several instances of deference and hedging. The adverb "respectfully" evidently pertains to ritual deference (see Table 9). There are many phrases which also express courtesy and respect for (or acknowledgment of) court ranking and conventionalism, such as "if agreeable to yourself and the Honorable Attorney General", "if you so desire", and "upon terms satisfactory to the Department of Justice". The use of "can" conveys tentativeness, whereas "suggest" displays moderation. In the same way, the verb phrase "I deem it" deploys a hedging strategy by confining the statement that follows to a personal perspective. The statement "as even with the imperfect record it is my opinion that weighty and sufficient reasons can be brought to the notice" can be ascribed to the range of "modest positionality", which is defined as the "ability to admit that it is impossible to ever perfectly solve or understand an issue completely" (Jacobs and Nienaber, 2011, p. 674). As such, it is a form of hedging; particularly, of admitting limiting circumstances. Finally, the expression "at any time" shows availability and openness. As such, it can be considered as a marker of negative politeness reinforcing boundaries and respect for higher ranks.

As a whole, the qualitative analysis carried out in this section has shown that the (im/)politeness strategies behind discourse markers are varied and multifaceted. For instance, devices that apparently serve hedging or softening purposes (e.g., "allegedly") have proved to serve quite diverse functions.

6 Conclusions

This paper was aimed at exploring the politeness strategies in supreme courts' judgments and opinions. To this aim, a set of (positive and negative) politeness markers (O'Keeffe et al., 2007; McCarthy and Carter, 2019) were analysed in three different corpora: the corpus of the decisions of the UK Supreme Court, the corpus of the opinions of the US Supreme Court, and the corpus of the judgments of the European Court of Justice.

The analysis revealed various pragmatic strategies that often go beyond the (im/)politeness intents described in the literature. For example, sharedness markers also showed deference strategies (as in "you know better than I do"). The same occurred to boosters featuring

contrastive or concessive connectives such as “it is true that... however” or “(...) is/are right, but...”. These expressions, in fact, were uttered to amplify the certainty of an opinion and, at the same time, they softened the impact of a statement. On the contrary, deference tools and softeners such as “I/we think” or “I/we suggest” could be used as persuasive devices which revealed the speaker’s stance (e.g., in “nowhere did we suggest that”). It was also noticed that such stance softeners may have a dual function. On the basis of their linguistic contexts, they could either boost or soften the proposition over which they have scope (Simon-Vandenbergen 2000; Fetzer 2014).

Additionally, a multi-word used to express one’s stance was the reformulation tool “I mean” (as in “I mean to insist”). Another unexpected stance marker was the approximator “a bit”, in phrases such as “not a bit”. In turn, multi-words generally used to restrict the scope of an argumentation could actually serve as approximators. In these cases, information was given or taken for granted (as in “it is unnecessary therefore for the purposes of this appeal to repeat”). On the other hand, vagueness expressions such as “(that) kind of” and “(that) sort of” not only served as hedged statements, but also as cohesive deictic elements in phrases such as “this kind of assessment”, or “this sort of proceeding”. Depersonalization markers (such as “they say”) are generally used to detach oneself from other people’s opinions. In the corpora, they were also applied as deictic elements and cohesive devices; in particular, to refer to lower courts’ decisions. Varied usages of politeness markers were also found in phrases expressing ritual deference, such as “with respect”. This phrase was actually used as a syntactical tool meaning “with regard to” and, hence, it was a reference marker (as in “with respect to the special consumption tax”). Finally, conventional politeness tokens such as “please” and “thank you” appeared in quotations of business correspondence or conversation transcripts. Therefore, they were not necessarily addressed to the courtroom participants.

As can be seen, an array of different pragmatic strategies came to the fore where politeness markers served more than one purpose. Such pragmatic functions ranged from stance and boosters to approximation and hedges. In addition, (syntactical) cohesive devices and deictic elements played a relevant role. The marker giving ground to impoliteness was noticed in the analysis of the new-information token “you see”, where the phrase following “you see” provided instances of impoliteness, as in “you see, it’s none of your business”. Therefore, it could be argued that the proposition over which “you see” has scope is rather impolite.

The multi-functionality of linguistic devices in the investigation of politeness strategies revealed complex and nuanced ways in which values, conventions, positionalities, and intents are conveyed. In institutional frameworks such as the legal one, directness and indirectness play a crucial role and linguistic choices must be pondered accordingly. Direct statements or requests tend to assert politeness by demonstrating respect for authority and ranks, whereas indirect language allows conversation participants to formulate messages by addressing face wants in moderate and deferred ways. As shown in the sections above, mitigation is crucial

in the realm of judicial polite discourse as it reduces the impact of face-threatening acts toward justices and/or peers. As hedging makes statements less direct and confrontational, it may be perceived as effective in court cases, especially when addressing high-ranked and powerful figures. By contrast, intensifiers and stance devices enhance the speaker's positionalities and point of view; in particular, when expressing criticism (e.g., towards lower courts or other institutions).

The research questions that this paper wished to address were the following ones: 1) "What are the (im/)politeness strategies in the decisions and opinions of the justices of the UK and US supreme courts and of the European Court of Justice?"; 2) Are there context-dependent (i.e., legal discourse-anchored) politeness strategies?; and 3) Which kind of (im/)politeness strategies are – or are not – employed? In answering the first question, this paper brought to the fore politeness and stance elements. It also highlighted that the majority of the politeness strategies were found in CoCELD and SCOTUS. Apparently, ECJC did not show many politeness elements, at least as regards the ones addressed in this paper. The answer to the second question is affirmative: the politeness strategies examined in the sections above are context-related, especially with regard to ritual deference (e.g., "My Lord"). Conversely, conventional politeness (i.e., "thank you" or "please") does not appear as heavily deployed in courtroom discourse. The politeness strategies that are developed (third question) are grounded in a variety of multifaceted tools, varying from sharedness (e.g., "as we know"), depersonalization (e.g., "they say"), stance softeners ("I think/suppose"), and tentativeness ("can"). The impoliteness strategies, on the other hand, mainly revolve around addressing negative face wants. For example, (2) contains expressions such as "usurping a role" and "serious interference", which show outright criticism and reinforce negative facework.

The current analysis has offered insights into the multi-functionality of linguistic devices in the politeness strategies deployed in supreme court decisions and opinions. Nonetheless, there are some inherent limitations that must be catered for. Firstly, this paper has provided only a few short sample statements per multi-word. In other words, the present study is based on relatively modest data. Reporting entire dialogues, for example, could have shown various politeness strategies more straightforwardly. Therefore, further research could focus on extended dialogues from CoCELD, SCOTUS and ECJC and bring to the fore (dis)similarities in (imp)politeness markers.

Additionally, the effectiveness of a thorough analysis of politeness strategies can vary on the basis of the domain focused on. Even within the legal field, for example, politeness and facework may differ depending on the oral or written mode, as well as according to the circumstances and branches of law focused on (e.g., criminal vs civil law; contracts vs human rights, etc.). Therefore, it can be asserted that this paper has only offered one of the many perspectives that can be gained while investigating the nuanced realm of politeness and face wants in courtrooms and in the legal field.

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