Law as a Symbolic System: A Comparative Analysis of Legal Interpretation in Latvia and Indonesia

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Abstract

The problem of legal objectivity occupies a central place in legal theory and comparative jurisprudence. Legal positivism interprets objectivity as the neutral and universal application of a normative text. However, judicial practice in various legal systems demonstrates that the interpretation of legal norms is shaped not only by the text of the law but also by the broader cultural, historical, and institutional context. The purpose of this study is to compare the characteristics of legal interpretation in judicial practice in Indonesia and Latvia. Methodologically, the study relies on an interdisciplinary approach combining methods from comparative law and legal linguistics. This approach allows us to consider legal interpretation as a process in which formal norms interact with symbolic meanings, collective memory, and the cognitive mechanisms of judicial reasoning. The results of the analysis demonstrate that objectivity in judicial practice is constructed through the symbolic alignment of legal norms with the cultural values and historical narratives of society. Based on a comparative analysis, an integrative model of legal interpretation is proposed, incorporating the textual core of the norm, the symbolic cultural context, collective memory, and the cognitive-contextual mechanisms of judicial reasoning. The results demonstrate that law functions as an interpretive and symbolic system, and that consideration of cultural and historical factors is a prerequisite for the development of modern comparative jurisprudence.

Keywords: *legal interpretation, comparative jurisprudence, cultural context of law, Latvia, Indonesia.*

JEL Classification: K10, K40

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1. Introduction

Contemporary comparative law is faced with the need to rethink classical notions of legal interpretation and the objectivity of law. Traditional approaches based on positivist doctrine and formal textual analysis assume that legal norms have a fixed meaning and can be universally applied regardless of the specific social and historical context. However, the practice of national and supranational judicial systems demonstrates that legal interpretation is never a purely mechanical process of textual application. Instead, it is formed within the complex interaction between language, collective memory, cultural norms, and the symbolic structures of society.

In recent decades, scholarly literature has seen increased interest in interpretive and culturally oriented legal epistemology, which views judicial interpretation as a process of constructing meaning within specific historical and cultural contexts. This approach helps explain why the same legal terms and formulas can acquire different meanings in different jurisdictions, as well as why universal legal principles are realized through local symbolic practices. In this context, comparative analysis of legal systems becomes not simply a tool for comparing norms and procedures, but a method for identifying the structures through which society's legal consciousness is shaped.

The purpose of this article is to develop a unified theoretical framework for legal interpretation that combines empirical analysis of the judicial practice of two jurisdictions (Indonesia and Latvia) with conceptual reflection on the nature of legal objectivity. Each of these systems illustrates unique ways of constructing meaning conditioned by history, culture, political context, and linguistic traditions. A comparative analysis of these cases allows us to identify a common interpretive model that transcends specific cultural differences.

The article devotes particular attention to the concept of objectivity in legal interpretation. The legal positivist model views objectivity as a neutral and universal application of textual norms. In contrast, empirical evidence demonstrates that objectivity in practice is shaped by the ability of a norm to resonate with the collective values, historical memory, and cultural traditions of a particular society.

The methodological significance of this study lies in its demonstration of the need for an interdisciplinary approach to comparative jurisprudence. Linguistic and cultural studies help understand the semantic flexibility of legal terms; psychological approaches reveal the influence of cognitive and emotional schemas on judicial reasoning; and sociological and historical analysis reveals how collective memory and

institutional tradition structure interpretive practices. Together, these elements form a holistic model of legal knowledge that reflects the symbolic nature of law and the culturally determined understanding of legal meaning. Thus, the article not only provides a comparative overview of the judicial practice of two jurisdictions but also formulates a theoretical model in which law is viewed as an interpretative and symbolic system mediated by culture, history, and language. This approach allows for a reconsideration of traditional understandings of objectivity, universality, and neutrality in law and provides a basis for further research in comparative jurisprudence focused on the culturally and historically determined interpretation of legal norms.

This forms a theoretical framework that links empirical cases with conceptual questions: how law acquires meaning, how legal consciousness is formed, and how judicial practice reconciles formal norms with the symbolic and cultural order of society. This framework serves as the basis for subsequent analysis and the construction of a unified comparative model of legal interpretation applicable to Indonesia and Latvia.

2. Literature Review

Contemporary legal theory increasingly views law not as a set of static textual prescriptions, but as a dynamic system of interpretation, formed in a historical and cultural context. A significant number of researchers emphasize that the meaning of legal norms does not exist independently of interpretive practice and is formed through the interaction of text, tradition, and institutional practices.

The philosophical-hermeneutic school of thought in legal scholarship emphasizes the interpretive nature of law. Thus, research in legal hermeneutics demonstrates that a legal norm functions as an open semiotic structure, the meaning of which develops through application. In particular, the metaphor of "impressionistic" interpretation of legal norms suggests that the legal text merely provides a framework within which the interpreter constructs meaning depending on the context and purposes of law enforcement.[5] This approach overcomes the traditional dichotomy between strict legal positivism and radical interpretivism, proposing a model in which the stability of the normative text is combined with the dynamics of interpretation. A similar position is taken by philosophical and legal analysis, based on Arthur Kaufman's hermeneutic theory, according to which law is a historically formed linguistic practice oriented toward justice. In this perspective, legal meaning does not precede interpretation, but rather emerges in the process of responsible interpretive judgment, constrained by the normative structures of the legal order.[6] This approach

[5] Fernando Barotti dos Santos, "Legal Norms as Artistic Painting: Hermeneutics and Impressionism in Law's Interpretation," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* (2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-026-10427-8.

[6] Cristina Alessi, "Law as a Spoken Practice Legal Meaning, Interpretation, and Digitalization: Revisiting Arthur Kaufmann," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* (2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-025-10418-1.

emphasizes the fundamental impossibility of a complete, formalized description of legal meaning, since legal interpretation is inevitably linked to human experience and social context.

The development of this line of analysis is linked to the concept of pragmatic contextualism, according to which legal meaning is formed in discursive practice and depends on the position of the interpreter and the social context of law enforcement.[7] In this model, legal interpretation is viewed as a process in which legal text, institutional norms, and social expectations interact to shape specific legal decisions. An important element of the hermeneutic understanding of law is the concept of legal tradition. Research shows that legal tradition is not a static set of rules, but rather an evolving practice of interpretation that unites different generations of lawyers and forms a collective legal memory.[8] In this sense, a legal text functions similarly to the fundamental texts of religious[9] or cultural traditions: its meaning is revealed through a long historical process of interpretation. Thus, contemporary legal philosophy increasingly views legal interpretation as a culturally and historically conditioned process in which the legal text serves as the starting point for the formation of normative meaning.

The second line of research concerns the analysis of the linguistic nature of law. Many studies emphasize that legal language is a complex symbolic system in which meaning is formed through the interaction of linguistic structures, cognitive models, and social practices. Research in cognitive linguistics shows that legal concepts are structured similarly to the ordinary conceptual categories of human thought. In particular, prototype categorization theory explains why legal terms different levels of abstraction and interpretation can have depending on the context.[10] According to this approach, legal categories are formed as hierarchical structures in which the meaning of a term is determined by its position in a system of conceptual relations.

Other studies focus on the role of pragmatic aspects of language. Analysis of constitutional texts shows that legal norms often contain hidden assumptions and implicit meanings that can significantly influence interpretation and political debate.[11]

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[7] Natalia Scavuzzo, "Pragmatic Contextualism and Legal Interpretation: Moving Beyond Interpretative Scepticism," *Diritto & Questioni Pubbliche* 25, no. 1 (2025): 161–176, https://www.dirittoequestionipubbliche.org/page/2025_n25-1/DQ25-1-02-stu-06-Scavuzzo.pdf.

[8] Marc O. DeGirolami, "The Very Idea of Tradition in Legal Interpretation [L'idea stessa di tradizione nel diritto]," *JUS – Rivista di Scienze Giuridiche* 2025, no. 4 (2025): 307–320, https://doi.org/10.26350/18277942_000245.

[9] Melissa A. Crouch, "Law and Religion in Indonesia: The Constitutional Court and the Blasphemy Law," *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 7, no. 1 (2012): 1–46, https://doi.org/10.1515/1932-0205.1391.

[10] Sylwia Wojtczak and Mateusz Zeifert, "Statutory Interpretation and Levels of Conceptual Categorisation: The Presumption of Legal Language Explained in Terms of Cognitive Linguistics," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 38, no. 3 (2025): 767–782, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-024-10118-2.

[11] Joshua Taiwo Ajenifari, Samuel Adebayo Omotunde, and Uche Oboko, "A Pragma-Linguistic Interpretation of Legal Communication: A Study of Sections 133 and 134 of the Nigerian Constitutional Provisions for Presidential Election," *International Journal of Language & Law* 14 (2025): F7–F23, https://doi.org/10.14762/jll.2025.F7.

Thus, legal texts are not entirely transparent: their meaning depends heavily on contextual factors and interpretive strategies. An additional dimension to this problem is the temporal variability of legal language. Studies of judicial practice demonstrate that the meaning of legal terms can change depending on the historical moment of interpretation, requiring consideration of the temporal context when using linguistic arguments.[12]

Translation analysis of legal texts also plays an important role in understanding legal language. Comparative studies show that translation errors can significantly alter normative meaning and influence law enforcement practice, particularly in international law.[13] This confirms that legal meaning is not a purely textual phenomenon, but is formed through communication between different legal cultures. New research directions are also related to the development of legal corpus linguistics, which uses large text corpora to analyze the meaning of legal terms.[14] Such methods allow for the empirical study of the linguistic use of legal concepts, although their application raises questions about the relationship between linguistic and legal meaning.[15] Taken together, these studies confirm that legal language functions as a complex symbolic system in which meaning is shaped through the interaction of cognitive, cultural, and institutional factors.

Considerable attention in the contemporary literature has been devoted to the role of judicial institutions in shaping legal meaning. Research shows that courts not only apply legal norms but also actively participate in their interpretation and development. Comparative studies of legal systems demonstrate differences between the continental and Anglo-Saxon models of interpretation. The continental tradition emphasizes systematicity and normative consistency, while the precedent-based model emphasizes the flexibility and creative role of judges.[16] These differences reflect deeper cultural and institutional features of legal systems.

An analysis of the case law of international and supranational courts demonstrates that interpretation plays a key role in the development of law. For example, studies of decisions of European judicial institutions demonstrate that judicial arguments are based on a combination of various interpretative methods,

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[12] Agnieszka Bielska-Brodziak, Marlena Drapalska-Grochowicz, and Marek Suska, "Dictionaries in Legal Interpretation as a Time-Sensitive Argument, or on Atemporal and Temporal Justifications," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* (2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-025-10410-9.

[13] Vojislav Jovanović, "Translation Errors in Serbian Legal Regulations and Their Impact on Text Interpretation and Law Application," *NBP. Nauka, bezbednost, policija* 31, no. 1 (2026): 81–94, https://doi.org/10.5937/nabepo31-53008.

[14] Ute Römer-Barron and Clark D. Cunningham, "Applied Corpus Linguistics and Legal Interpretation: A Rapidly Developing Field of Interdisciplinary Scholarship," *Applied Corpus Linguistics* 4, no. 1 (2024): 100080, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acorp.2023.100080.

[15] Dana Roemling, "Statutory Interpretation and Corpus Evidence: Tensions Between Linguistic Reality and Legal Meaning," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 39 (2026): 1487–1508, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-025-10336-2.

[16] Yevhen Leheza, Oleksandr Kurakin, Olha Shapovalova, Kateryna Sokh, and Artur Makarov, "Interpretation of Regulatory and Legal Acts in Contemporary Contexts: Foreign Experience, Comparative Perspectives, and Pathways for Regulatory Reform," *Nusantara: Journal of Law Studies* 5, no. 1 (2026): 102–122, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18727992.

including textual, systemic, and teleological approaches.[17] In some cases, judicial interpretation becomes a tool for resolving institutional conflicts and uncertainties in the legal order. For example, an analysis of land disputes in Indonesia shows that different interpretative approaches by courts can lead to conflicting decisions even under identical factual circumstances.[18] Similar problems arise in administrative law, where the expansion of judicial jurisdiction requires a new interpretation of existing normative categories.[19]

Research also shows that judicial interpretation can serve as a tool for social change. For example, an analysis of religious court practice in Indonesia demonstrates that judges employ expansive interpretations of Islamic inheritance law to promote greater social justice.[20] Thus, judicial practice serves as an important space for the formation of legal meaning, where statutory text, legal traditions, and social values interact.

Another important line of research concerns the analysis of cultural and historical factors influencing legal interpretation. Contemporary work in the sociology of law and comparative law demonstrates that legal meanings are shaped by social conflict, political processes, and historical traditions. For example, research on indigenous rights demonstrates that judicial interpretation can reflect broader processes of colonial legacies and cultural recognition.[21] Similarly, the development of international climate law is associated with the emergence of new normative concepts, such as intergenerational justice, that reflect changing global understandings of state responsibility.[22] Historical research shows that legal interpretation is closely linked to political ideologies and cultural values. An analysis of the judicial practice of the Spanish Republic demonstrates that the interpretation of laws was largely determined by the moral and ideological attitudes of judges.[23] Similar processes are

[17] Suhayla Khalil Viana de Castro, "Legal Interpretation in Decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union: A Study of the Judgment of 22 December 2022, Case C-61/21," *Revista Jurídica Portucalense*, no. 38 (2025): 1–23, https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(38)2025.jur-01.

[18] Nurbaedah and Marwan Hayeemaming, "The Partij Akta Principle vs. Legal Precedent: How Divergent Interpretations in Indonesian Courts Create Uncertainty in Land Dispute Resolution," *International Journal of Law and Society* 4, no. 3 (2025): 406–424, https://doi.org/10.59683/ijls.v4i3.131.

[19] Dinoroy Marganda Aritonang, Susi Dwi Harijanti, Zainal Muttaqin, and Ali Abdurahman, "Extensive Jurisdiction of State Administrative Courts in Indonesia: Interpretation and Legal Coherence Issues," *Public Integrity* 27, no. 3 (2025): 287–299, https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2023.2290750.

[20] Muhammad Lutfi Hakim, "Between Hibah and Waṣiat Wājibah for Non-Muslims: Expansive Legal Interpretations by Indonesian Religious Judges in Inheritance Cases," *Al-Aḥwāl: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 17, no. 2 (2024): 147–166, https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2024.17201.

[21] Erika Ruth Gavenus, Rachelle Beveridge, Iris Siwallace Skw'asmana, and Terre Satterfield, "Whose Doctrine, Whose Priority?: On the Troublesome Legal Interpretation of the Aboriginal Right to Fish by Canadian Courts," *Environmental Science & Policy* 176 (2026): 104294, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2025.104294.

[22] Eliana Díaz-Cruces, Camilo Zamora-Ledezma, and Simone Belli, "Intergenerational Equity in International Climate Law as a Legal Criterion for the Interpretation of State Climate Obligations According to the ICJ," *Laws* 15, no. 1 (2026): 10, https://doi.org/10.3390/laws15010010.

[23] Rubén Pérez Trujillano, "El espejismo positivista: Interpretación del derecho e ideología en la España republicana (1931–1936)" ["The Positivist Mirage: Legal Interpretation and Ideology in Republican Spain (1931–1936)"], *Historia y Política*, no. 52 (2024): 253–285, https://doi.org/10.18042/hp.2024.AL.

observed in international institutions. Studies of early debates at the United Nations show that the interpretation of international legal norms was shaped by global debates on development, demography, and economic inequality.[24] Thus, law serves not only as a normative system but also as a form of cultural communication reflecting the collective perceptions of society.

Modern legal theory also pays attention to changes in interpretive practices caused by the increasing complexity of legal systems. For example, research shows that large linguistic models can be used to classify interpretive arguments in judicial decisions.[25] Similar methods are used in intelligent legal search systems, where context-sensitive algorithms take into account the user's jurisdiction and professional context.[26] However, many researchers emphasize the limitations of the algorithmic approach to law. Legal interpretation includes evaluative and moral elements that are difficult to formalize in computational models.[27] An additional factor in the transformation of law is the crisis of modern legislation associated with the growth of regulations and the increasing complexity of legal systems. Under these conditions, interpretation becomes a central mechanism for maintaining the consistency of the legal order.[28]

An additional dimension to the interpretive nature of law is evident in research from related disciplines, which demonstrate that legal norms do not function in isolation, but rather in complex interactions with the economic, institutional, and cultural structures of society. This broadening of the analytical horizon allows us to consider law not only as a system of texts and doctrines, but also as an element of a broader network of social institutions in which legal meaning is formed through the interaction of normative principles, cultural values, and practical regulatory mechanisms. For example, economic research on the factors driving export diversification in China demonstrates that the institutional environment, the level of human capital, and the quality of economic regulation significantly influence the formation of development strategies and state economic policy.[29] Although this study

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[24] Dana Schmalz, "The Population Growth Discourse in the First Decades of the United Nations: Interpretations of Global Economic Inequality and the Struggles for a Just International Legal Order," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 38, no. 2 (2025): 131–147, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156524000621.

[25] Gaspar Dugac and Tilmann Altwicker, "Classifying Legal Interpretations Using Large Language Models," *Artificial Intelligence and Law* (2025), https://doi.org/10.1007/s10506-025-09447-9.

[26] R. Udayakumar, Haider Mohammed Abbas, R. Velmurugan, A. Vanathi, N. Kalyana Sundaram, and Ishimbaev Rafael Nailevich, "Context-Aware Query Interpretation in Legal Information Systems," *Indian Journal of Information Sources and Services* 15, no. 3 (2025): 122–130, https://doi.org/10.51983/ijiss-2025.IJISS.15.3.14.

[27] Cristina Alessi, "Law as a Spoken Practice Legal Meaning, Interpretation, and Digitalization: Revisiting Arthur Kaufmann," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* (2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-025-10418-1.

[28] Krzysztof Koźmiński and Paulina Katarzyna Konca, "The Law of Interpretation as a Recipe for Legal Knowledge in the Era of Post-Modernization of Legislation," *Theory and Practice of Legislation* 14, no. 1 (2025): 1–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/20508840.2025.2521177.

[29] Jabbar Ul-Haq, Hubert Visas, Anatolijs Krivins, Rita Remeikienė, and Qazi Muhammad Adnan Hye, "The Drivers of Export Product Diversification in China: Does Natural Resource Endowments Matter?,"

is related to economic policy, its results underscore a broader conclusion: economic institutions and legal frameworks are shaped by the interpretation of normative principles of development, competition, and regulation. Similarly, studies of the relationship between governance quality, the rule of law, and economic growth demonstrate that legal institutions function not only as formal regulators but also as institutional mechanisms that interpret and implement the principles of public administration and economic policy.[30] In a broader cultural dimension, comparative studies of religious legal traditions show that religious norms continue to exert significant influence on public administration and legal culture in different regions of the world, shaping specific patterns of legal interpretation and judicial practice.[31] Finally, an analysis of legal policy in the energy sector in Indonesia demonstrates that legal norms and institutional regulatory mechanisms develop in a constant tension between normative ideals of equitable and sustainable development and their practical implementation in political and economic conditions.[32] Taken together, these studies from related fields confirm that legal norms and legal institutions cannot be understood solely as textual constructs: they are formed within a complex network of economic, cultural, and political interpretations, further supporting the thesis of the cultural and historical mediation of legal objectivity.

Analysis of contemporary academic literature shows that legal interpretation is increasingly viewed as a complex, culturally conditioned process in which the text of the law, linguistic structures, institutional practices, and social values interact. Research in the fields of legal philosophy, linguistics, comparative law, and the sociology of law converge in recognizing that legal meaning is not a fixed property of a normative text, but is formed through the process of interpretation.

3. Material and Methods

This study draws on a qualitative comparative legal analysis aimed at identifying culturally conditioned and symbolically mediated mechanisms of legal interpretation in two jurisdictions: Indonesia and Latvia. The primary research material consists of judicial decisions of national constitutional and supreme courts, including constitutional cases concerning fundamental rights and the rule of law. These cases were selected for their ability to demonstrate how legal meaning is constructed through cultural, historical, and symbolic resources.

Technological and Economic Development of Economy 31, no. 2 (2025): 597–618, https://doi.org/10.3846/tede.2025.23026.

[30] Esat A. Durguti, Avni H. Alidemaj, and Anatolijs Krivins, "Good Governance and Rule of Law Effect on GDP Growth: Lessons for Emerging Economies," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 10, no. 1 (2024): 37–60, https://doi.org/10.47305/JLIA24101041d.

[31] Andrejs Vilks, Aldona Kipane, and Anatolijs Krivins, "The Role of Religious Norms in the Formation of Legal Systems: The Theological Foundations of Law in Different World Religions," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. 3, themed issue (2025): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.3029.

[32] I Gusti Ayu Putri Kartika, Ida Ayu Astarini, Putu Gede Arya Sumerta Yasa, Bagus Hermanto, and Anatolijs Kriviņš, "Quo Vadis Energy Legal Policy towards Equitable and Sustainable Development in Indonesia," *Law Reform* 21, no. 2 (2025): 266–294, https://doi.org/10.14710/lr.v21i2.66743.

The methodological framework of the study combines several approaches. First, a qualitative analysis of judicial texts is used to identify the semantic structures underlying legal reasoning. Second, a comparative historical method is employed to understand the context in which legal norms and their interpretive practices were formed. This allows for the correlation of formal court decisions with the cultural and political conditions of each jurisdiction. The data systematization includes the following categories: (1) textual formulations and legal terms, (2) symbolic and cultural meanings, (3) historical and social narratives, and (4) epistemological approaches to objectivity. These categories enable the identification of structural similarities and differences between judicial practices and the construction of a general model of legal interpretation that takes into account cultural and symbolic determinacy.

Furthermore, the analysis draws on interdisciplinary sources: works in linguistics, cultural anthropology, the psychology of judicial decision-making, and the sociology of law. This combination of methods provides a holistic approach to the study of legal interpretation that considers both formal norms and the contextual conditions of their application, as well as the symbolic and cognitive levels of legal understanding in various legal systems. Taken together, the selected methods allow for the construction of a unified theoretical framework that links the text of the law, collective memory, cultural and symbolic resources, and judicial reasoning, enabling a comparative analysis of legal interpretation.

4. Results and Discussion

An analysis of Indonesian and Latvian judicial practice demonstrates that legal interpretation is not a purely textual operation, but rather a contextual cognitive process. Courts rely on culturally conditioned narratives, collective expectations, and the symbolic authority of legal language, which is consistent with the concept of culturally conditioned objectivity.

The interpretive dynamics observed in Indonesian jurisprudence provide a compelling starting point for examining how legal meaning is culturally constructed across different legal systems. The Indonesian examples — ranging from constitutional interpretation[33] of indigenous rights to the symbolic reframing of moral and administrative norms — show that courts inevitably rely on linguistic categories infused with collective memory, cultural sensibilities, and emotional significance. Yet Indonesia is not an outlier; rather, it exemplifies a broader pattern in which law acquires meaning through the symbolic frameworks of the society in which it operates. To fully appreciate this phenomenon, it is necessary to place the Indonesian experience in conversation with another jurisdiction whose legal development has been shaped by markedly different historical conditions. Latvia offers precisely such a comparative counterpoint. By juxtaposing the Indonesian and Latvian approaches, we

[33] Simon Butt, Bisariyadi, and Fritz Siregar, "International Law in the Indonesian Constitutional Court: A Typology of Use," *Asian Journal of International Law* 16, no. 1 (2026): 105–126, https://doi.org/10.1017/S204425132510074X.

can more clearly illuminate the extent to which linguistic structures, historical narratives, and emotional vocabularies anchor the interpretive horizons of legal norms. This comparative movement reveals not merely differences in culture or doctrine, but the deeper methodological insight that legal interpretation everywhere is mediated by the symbolic life of language.

When placed in comparative perspective, the Indonesian cases[34] illuminate a broader theoretical point: that legal interpretation is fundamentally shaped by the linguistic and symbolic resources available within a particular society. The Indonesian judiciary's reliance on expressions such as *rasa keadilan masyarakat*, *martabat manusia*, *kepatutan*, and *kearifan lokal* demonstrates how legal meaning is constructed through vocabularies that are historically sedimented and emotionally resonant. These are not mere rhetorical ornaments; they are cultural signifiers that supply the semantic material through which judges articulate, negotiate, and legitimize legal norms. The Latvian experience — particularly the Constitutional Court's interpretive emphasis on *tiesiskā paļāvība* (legitimate expectations) and constitutional continuity — offers a contrasting yet complementary illustration. What emerges from this comparison is not simply a descriptive observation of cultural diversity, but a deeper methodological insight: legal interpretation is inseparable from the symbolic universe that sustains it. In Indonesia, this universe is characterized by moral pluralism, communal ethics, indigenous cosmologies, and the ideological legacy of *Pancasila*. These symbolic structures infuse legal language with values of harmony, social balance, and communal justice. In Latvia, by contrast, the symbolic universe is shaped by the imperative of restoring the rule of law, safeguarding institutional trust, and maintaining constitutional stability after decades of political suppression. Its legal language foregrounds certainty, continuity, and systemic coherence.

The Indonesian and Latvian cases jointly demonstrate that the universality of formal norms is refracted through culturally specific vocabularies of meaning. In Indonesia, the interpretation of terms such as *keadilan*, *kesusilaan*, and *kepatutan* cannot be divorced from the communal ethos of a plural society and the post-Reformasi reorientation[35] toward substantive justice and democratic accountability. In Latvia, by contrast, linguistic categories like *tiesiskā paļāvība* and *konstitucionālā identitāte* draw their force from the nation's historical struggle for legal stability and preservation of statehood. Each jurisdiction thus employs a legal language shaped by its own mnemonic commitments and emotional landscapes.

These differences do not undermine the comparability of their interpretive practices; instead, they underscore the article's central thesis that law is fundamentally a symbolic system. The meaning of legal norms is not merely discovered but

[34] Muchamad Ali Safa'at, "The Roles of the Indonesian Constitutional Court in Determining State-Religion Relations," *Constitutional Review* 8, no. 1 (2022): 113–150, https://doi.org/10.31078/consrev815.

[35] Bagus Hermanto, "Deliberate Legislative Reforms to Improve the Legislation Quality in Developing Countries: Case of Indonesia," *Theory and Practice of Legislation* 11, no. 1 (2023): 1–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/20508840.2022.2080392.

constructed through the interplay of language, collective memory, and socio-historical consciousness. In this light, objectivity is not a universal structure imposed from above but a culturally mediated achievement sustained by the symbolic coherence of legal discourse within a particular society. By reading Indonesian and Latvian jurisprudence side by side, it becomes clear that the limits of objectivity are not defects of legal interpretation but features of its cultural embeddedness. They reveal that law draws its authority not from textual rigidity but from its capacity to resonate with the symbolic worlds, emotional economies, and historical trajectories of the communities it governs. The comparative inquiry therefore reinforces a broader methodological claim: to understand law as an interpretive practice, one must understand the cultural life of legal language itself.

This comparative insight complicates the classical ideal of legal objectivity. If objectivity is imagined as the mechanical application of fixed textual meaning, then both the Indonesian and Latvian examples clearly contradict it. But if objectivity is reconceptualized as the coherence between legal norms and the symbolic order of a given society, then judicial interpretation in both countries can be understood as embodying a deeper and more contextually robust form of objectivity — one that acknowledges the historical, emotional, and linguistic conditions under which law becomes intelligible. Data analyzed using the examples of Latvia and Indonesia do more than enrich doctrinal understanding; they compel a rethinking of the methodological assumptions that structure comparative jurisprudence itself. These examples demonstrate that any inquiry into legal interpretation must move beyond the surface of statutory texts and engage with the deeper symbolic architectures through which societies construct legal meaning. Law, in this sense, cannot be understood without attention to the linguistic forms, emotional registers, and historical narratives that shape the interpretive imagination of judicial actors.

From a methodological standpoint, this recognition destabilizes the traditional positivistic aspiration to treat legal interpretation as a universally transferable technique. What emerges instead is the need for an interdisciplinary paradigm—one that draws from linguistics to analyze the semantic flexibility of legal terms, from psychology to understand how emotional and cognitive schemas influence interpretive judgments, and from cultural theory to grasp how collective memory and identity infuse legal language with symbolic power. Under this framework, the judiciary is not merely an institutional interpreter of norms but a cultural agent that participates in the ongoing construction of a society's symbolic order. The Indonesian jurisprudence illustrates this vividly. Terms such as *rasa keadilan masyarakat*, *martabat manusia*, and *kepatutan* are not interchangeable with their literal translations. They carry emotional density and cultural specificity that cannot be fully grasped through classical hermeneutic tools alone. Similarly, Latvian concepts such as *tiesiskā paļāvība* or constitutional continuity draw their interpretive force from the lived experiences of political rupture and reconstruction. These linguistic forms encode epistemic commitments — ways of knowing and valuing — that structure the possibilities of legal reasoning. The methodological implication is therefore clear: comparative jurisprudence must treat legal idioms as sites of cultural rationality, not

as neutral linguistic containers.

Recognizing this has two important consequences. First, it reveals that comparative work cannot rely solely on doctrinal mapping or structural parallels. Instead, it requires attentiveness to the symbolic economies of legal systems — the metaphors, emotional languages, and historical imaginaries that inform judicial interpretation. Second, it underscores the methodological necessity of cultural relativism, not in the sense of abandoning normative judgment, but in acknowledging that different legal cultures articulate different models of legal rationality. These differences are not deviations from a universal ideal; they are expressions of distinct historical trajectories and cognitive frameworks. Incorporating culturally specific cases from Indonesia and Latvia thus transforms the article's analysis from a theoretical reflection into a comparative methodology anchored in empirical richness. The examples show that legal meaning is never static. It is negotiated through a dynamic interplay between linguistic categorization, symbolic resonance, and collective consciousness — an interplay that constantly reshapes what counts as "objective," "reasonable," or "just" within a given legal order. The methodological takeaway is that comparative jurisprudence must embrace this dynamism, revising its assumptions about stability, universality, and neutrality in legal interpretation.

Comparative jurisprudence is not merely an exercise in cataloguing laws or drawing analogies between statutes; it is an epistemological endeavor concerned with the foundations of legal knowledge itself. The Indonesian and Latvian examples, when considered together, reveal that legal meaning is contingent upon the interpretive frameworks embedded within specific cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. This raises a critical question for comparative scholarship: what does it mean to "know" law across jurisdictions whose symbolic and emotional vocabularies differ fundamentally? Traditional epistemologies of law, influenced by positivism or doctrinal formalism, have tended to treat legal systems as abstract structures whose logic can be universally apprehended. Comparative legal scholarship often assumes that principles such as justice, legality, or due process possess stable, transposable content that can be measured, contrasted, or ranked across national boundaries. The Indonesian and Latvian cases problematize this assumption. In Indonesia, *rasa keadilan masyarakat* integrates communal ethics, local custom, and post-Reformasi democratic ideals into the interpretive work of judges. In Latvia, terms like *tiesiskā paļāvība* encode historical memory of occupation, institutional disruption, and constitutional reconstruction. In both cases, the semantic and emotional weight of legal concepts shapes judicial reasoning as much as formal rules do.

From an epistemological perspective, these observations demand a shift from an abstract, universalist conception of legal knowledge to a culturally situated model of understanding. Legal norms are not self-interpreting; their meaning emerges through practices of translation, negotiation, and symbolic attunement within a given socio-legal environment. Comparative jurists must therefore attend not only to textual similarities and procedural analogies but also to the symbolic grammars — the culturally specific ways in which communities conceptualize legality, fairness, and obligation. Knowledge of law, in this sense, is inseparable from the interpretive lenses

and emotional-symbolic repertoires that legal actors bring to their work. This epistemological stance carries significant methodological implications. First, it legitimizes the use of interdisciplinary tools in comparative legal analysis. Linguistics elucidates the polysemy of legal terms; sociology and anthropology illuminate how collective memory and social norms shape interpretive expectations; psychology reveals the cognitive and affective dimensions of judicial decision-making. Second, it compels a reflexive awareness of the scholar's own positionality: the comparative jurist must recognize that their analytical categories are themselves culturally and historically situated. Without such reflexivity, claims about universality or objectivity risk obscuring the very cultural and symbolic processes that constitute law in practice.

Finally, this epistemology reframes the notion of objectivity in legal interpretation. Rather than conceptualizing objectivity as the mechanical application of immutable rules, a culturally situated epistemology views it as a coherence between legal norms and the symbolic universe of the society in which they operate. In Indonesia, objectivity is expressed through alignment with communal notions of justice and social harmony; in Latvia, it is articulated through fidelity to constitutional continuity and rule-of-law principles. Across contexts, objectivity becomes not a fixed standard imposed from above but a historically and culturally mediated achievement, realized through the interplay of language, memory, and collective consciousness.

In sum, integrating a culturally situated epistemology into comparative jurisprudence transforms the discipline. It shifts the focus from formalistic comparison to a deeper inquiry into the interpretive mechanisms through which law acquires meaning, legitimacy, and authority. The Indonesian and Latvian examples exemplify this approach, demonstrating that understanding law comparatively requires more than technical analysis — it requires an engagement with the cultural, emotional, and historical matrices in which legal knowledge is produced. This epistemological orientation not only strengthens the rigor of comparative legal studies but also affirms the interpretive and symbolic nature of law itself.

Legal interpretation is never a purely textual practice; rather, it is a situated cognitive process whereby judges draw upon culturally embedded narratives, collective expectations, and the symbolic authority of legal language itself. Moreover, by observing how different jurisdictions negotiate ambiguity, resolve normative tensions, and mobilize symbolic vocabularies, we can more clearly discern the contours of legal consciousness as it manifests in lived practice. Seen in their totality, the foregoing examples reveal a consistent methodological trajectory within Indonesian judicial practice — one that underscores the inherently interpretive and symbolically mediated character of legal reasoning. Indonesian courts[36] do not merely apply statutory norms as fixed textual commands; rather, they reconstruct those norms by drawing upon culturally resonant linguistic expressions that allow legal meaning to cohere with social experience. Judicial interpretation thus becomes a process of translating the law into the moral vocabularies and symbolic frameworks that

[36] Dian Agung Wicaksono and Faiz Rahman, "Influencing or Intervention? Impact of Constitutional Court Decisions on the Supreme Court in Indonesia," *Constitutional Review* 8, no. 2 (2022): 260–294, https://doi.org/10.31078/consrev823.

Indonesian society already recognizes as authoritative. In place of a thin, positivistic conception of objectivity detached from social life, Indonesian jurisprudence advances a thicker form of objectivity grounded in the coherence between legal norms and the symbolic order of society. Objectivity, in this view, is located not in textual rigidity but in the law's capacity to resonate with collective values, historical experience, and the emotional architectures that sustain communal life.

The cases of Indonesia and Latvia discussed above allow us to formulate a more general theoretical understanding of the nature of legal interpretation. Despite significant institutional, historical, and cultural differences between these legal systems, their judicial practice demonstrates similar interpretative dynamics. In all cases, legal meaning is formed not only through the text of the law, but also through the broader symbolic structure of society, within which legal norms acquire meaning and legitimacy. First, in all cases, legal meaning is formed through the interaction of the text of the law and culturally significant categories that provide the normative orientation of judicial reasoning. Second, interpretation relies on collective memory and historical narratives that structure legal consciousness and determine the legitimacy of judicial decisions. Third, legal language functions as a symbolic mechanism, enabling the alignment of abstract norms with social experience and ensuring consistency between norms and the symbolic order. In Indonesia, this is manifested through the alignment of norms with moral and social expectations. In Latvia, this is achieved through ensuring institutional stability and trust. This approach allows us to view objectivity as a dynamic, culturally determined characteristic of legal reasoning, rather than as an abstract standard.

This comparative perspective demonstrates that law functions as a special form of symbolic communication. Legal texts are not self-sufficient sources of meaning; they require interpretation, which inevitably relies on culturally determined categories, historical narratives, and collective expectations. Judicial reasoning, therefore, is the process of translating normative formulas into the language of socially recognized values and symbolic reference points. Indonesian jurisprudence provides a vivid illustration of this dynamic. Expressions such as *rasa keadilan masyarakat*, *kepatutan, martabat manusia,* and *kearifan lokal* play a key role in court decisions. These categories reflect moral and social notions formed in the context of the cultural pluralism of Indonesian society and the ideological legacy of Pancasila. As a result, judicial interpretation often seeks to align formal legal norms with collective perceptions of social justice and harmony. Here, legal language functions as a mediator between state law and the moral expectations of society. The Latvian experience demonstrates a different, yet conceptually comparable, interpretive structure. Concepts such as *tiesiskā paļāvība* (legitimate expectations), constitutional continuity, and legal stability occupy a central place in the practice of the Constitutional Court. These categories are closely linked to the historical memory of the restoration of statehood after the Soviet period and the desire to ensure the stability of the constitutional order. In Latvian legal discourse, legal language reflects the collective experience of political rupture and institutional reconstruction. Judicial interpretation is therefore oriented toward maintaining trust in legal institutions and

preserving the systemic coherence of the legal order.

Despite the obvious differences between these legal systems, a comparative analysis reveals a common interpretive model. First, legal meaning is formed through the interaction of the statutory text and culturally significant concepts, which provide the normative orientation of judicial reasoning. Second, judicial interpretation inevitably relies on collective memory and historical narratives, which shape the perception of the legitimacy of legal institutions. Third, legal language functions as a symbolic mechanism, allowing abstract norms to be aligned with society's social experience.

This model allows us to rethink the traditional notion of the objectivity of legal interpretation. In the classical positivist perspective, objectivity is understood as the neutral application of fixed textual meanings. However, a comparative analysis reveals that in practice, objectivity is achieved through the alignment of legal norms with the symbolic order of a particular society. Judicial reasoning becomes a process of maintaining this alignment, not simply a mechanical extraction of meaning from the normative text.

In Indonesia, the objectivity of interpretation is manifested through the conformity of legal decisions with public notions of social justice and moral harmony. In Latvia, it is expressed through fidelity to the principles of constitutional continuity and legal stability. Thus, a comparative analysis of these jurisdictions confirms that legal interpretation is a culturally mediated process in which legal norms acquire meaning through the interaction of language, memory, and collective consciousness. In this sense, law functions not only as a system of rules but also as a symbolic structure that ensures the normative coordination of social life. The methodological significance of this conclusion for comparative law is that the analysis of legal systems must consider not only institutional structures and normative texts, but also the cultural grammars of legal language. These grammars determine the ways in which courts formulate arguments, resolve normative conflicts, and construct legal meaning. Consequently, comparative jurisprudence must view legal systems as culturally rooted interpretive practices. This approach allows us to see law not as a universal set of technical procedures, but as a dynamic symbolic system through which societies express their historical values, political expectations, and notions of justice.

5. Conclusions

In both jurisdictions studied, legal language serves a symbolic function, aligning formal norms with collective values. In Indonesia, judicial language is imbued with ethical and emotional categories reflecting local customs and public notions of justice. Latvian judicial language is oriented toward historical continuity and institutional trust. These differences do not hinder the comparability of judicial practice; on the contrary, they highlight the key methodological idea of the article: law functions as a symbolic system, and its interpretation depends on the cultural, historical, and institutional context. The meaning of a norm is formed through the

interaction of text, collective memory, and the symbolic order, which helps explain the diversity of approaches to similar legal problems.

A positivist understanding of objectivity presupposes the universal applicability of statutory text. Empirical evidence shows that objectivity in judicial practice is culturally and historically mediated. In Indonesia, objectivity is determined by the conformity of norms with moral and public notions of justice. In Latvia, it is determined by fidelity to constitutional continuity and the maintenance of institutional stability. Thus, objectivity is not fixed or imposed from above; it is constructed through the symbolic resonance of the norm with the cultural, historical, and institutional reality of the society in which it is applied.

A comparison of these two jurisdictions allows us to formulate a unified theoretical model of legal interpretation, including the following elements: 1) The textual core of the norm—formal provisions of the law and procedural standards; 2) The symbolic layer — cultural, historical, and moral meanings that ensure the legitimacy of the application of the norm; 3) Collective memory and historical narratives — social experience, institutional traditions, and historical continuity that influence judicial decisions; 4) The cognitive-contextual process — the mechanisms of judicial reasoning, including emotional and cognitive schemas through which the judge translates formal norms into socially recognized frameworks. This model explains why judicial decisions formally based on the same text can have different interpretative trajectories in different countries, and how the comparability of judicial practices can be simultaneously maintained at the level of symbolic and cultural analysis.

Taken together, the results demonstrate that law functions as an interpretive and symbolic system, with judicial practice acting as a cultural agent maintaining coherence between norms and the collective order of society. A unified model of legal interpretation, derived from Indonesia and Latvia, demonstrates that legal knowledge is shaped by text, culture, memory, and cognitive context, ensuring both local legitimacy and international comparability. Thus, comparative jurisprudence must go beyond textual analysis and consider the cultural and symbolic determinacy of law.

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