

# NARRATIVES OF JUSTICE AND POWER: A LAW AND LITERATURE ANALYSIS OF LEGAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH TEXTS

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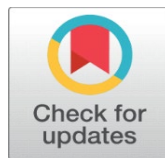
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## ABSTRACT

The interrelation of law and literature provides a critical approach towards the legal texts as narrative and cultural texts and not as documents only. This paper explores the way justice and power are constructed narratively in the current English law books, especially the Supreme Court decisions. The proposed study with the qualitative and interpretive research design is based on the idea of narrative analysis, discourse analysis, and legal consciousness theory to examine the influence of judicial language on the formation of meanings of power, rights, and legitimacy. They were analysed with thematic coding, and a purposive sample of judgments was identified with the use of thematic coding. The results indicate that judicial rulings can be understood as narratives in a structured form in which justice is viewed as a dynamic and situational process, and it is usually based on constitutional and moral arguments. Power is expressed as a complicated interrelation of state power and judicial control, where the law serves as a source of legitimization of as well as the regulation of institutional control. Moreover, the analysis proves that legal texts themselves are also an active participant in the development of legal consciousness that shapes the perceptions and attitudes of individuals towards legal systems. The analysis of legal judgments in terms of law and literature highlights the value of the study of legal discourse as a cultural and interpretive practice that is situated in the wider socio-political framework. The study adds to the important debates of justice, inequality, and governance and is consistent with current academic endeavours to analyse law as a narrative construction site and social meaning.

**Keywords:** Law and Literature, Legal Consciousness, Justice, Power, Judicial Narratives



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of interdisciplinary law and literature theory has been of immense importance in broadening the knowledge of the legal systems as it has brought into focus the need to regard law as not only in terms of rules and institutions but also in terms of culture and practice of storytelling. Instead of legal norms, the opinions of the judiciary

or the texts of the law relate a long narrative that interprets the facts, attributes blame, and dispenses the punishment by the skill of rhetoric. When viewed through this light, law has a storytelling role, which, similar to literature, describes arguments, privileges voices, and painstakingly creates meaning (Paskey, 2021; Hilson, 2022). This gives legal texts the ability to be viewed as not just technical, but as interpretive texts, that are part of the larger culture and ideology. The most important factor in this cross-disciplinary investigation is the notion of legal consciousness that implies how people, institutions and societies conceptualize, internalize and associate themselves with the law. Rather than formal legal knowledge, legal consciousness entails the perceptions of justice, fairness, authority, and rights, which are constituted in daily experience, hence bridging legal systems with social experience (Holtermann et al., 2022; Krešić, 2022). This concept indicates that social practices continuously interpret and reinterpret law and, as such, is an active and contextual phenomenon. Furthermore, both formal logic and informal cultural interpretations influence legal consciousness and reveal how legal norms are negotiated in the socio-political setting (Hage, 2022; Olsen and Toddington, 2022). It also indicates the impact of social hierarchies and cultural capital that dictate the extent to which various groups gain access, interpret, and react to legal authority (Young and Billings, 2020). The recent scholarship has also underlined the importance of semiotics and discourse in creating the meaning of law. Law works by systems of signs, symbols and interpretive codes that transcend the legal provisions and bind legal reasoning to wider cultural discourses and ideological systems (Ergashev, 2025). In the same way, constitutional and legal discourses frequently operate within intricate systems of symbols which can obscure or strengthen power dynamics, and constitute the manner in which power and legitimacy are imagined (Belov, 2022). These methods highlight that the legal meaning is not constituted but is constantly being reproduced in interpretive practices that represent underlying power relations. Dzüvichü and Chong (2026)

Here, language is an important component since legal English is distinguished by specific stylistic, rhetorical, and semantic characteristics that help to provide legal discourse with authority and legitimacy (Griffin, 2024). The language used in judicial texts is purposeful to create logical coherence and institutional credibility and at the same time influence the development of interpretation of facts and norms. Through this, legal judgments may be interpreted as discursive and narrative in that meaning can be built up by the combination of language, structure and context. This view is consistent with more general theoretical approaches that place law in the context of art and culture acknowledging its aesthetic, symbolic and performative aspects (Manderson, 2019).

Regardless of these theoretical advances, the body of literature on the systematic study of judicial texts as narrative forms of justice and power in the context of a law and literature approach is still very sparse. Current literature tends to keep legal analysis and literary interpretation as a distinct area, thus ignoring the possibilities of combining these methods to gain a more comprehensive insight into the process of legal meaning-making and communication. Very little has been done to explore the role of judicial narratives in developing legal consciousness, particularly in modern times where the issue of justice, rights, and authority are being challenged.

This is especially relevant when it comes to handling this gap in the context of modern socio-political issues when legal systems are at the heart of resolving inequality, governance, and human rights-related conflicts. The decisions made in the court cases do not only resolve a matter but also have implications for our conception of justice and legitimacy, thereby affecting the social discourses at large. An approach that involves narrative and interpretation in analysing the cases provides useful insights into how law constructs justice and power and is well-suited for the concerns of the journal. This strategy will help in understanding how much the legal discourse is reactive in relation to the changing social issues such as justice and equity.

This study is guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To analyse how narratives of justice and power are constructed in contemporary English legal texts, particularly judicial judgments.
- 2) To examine how legal consciousness is represented and shaped through the language, structure, and discourse of legal narratives.
- 3) To interpret judicial texts within a law and literature framework, highlighting their cultural, rhetorical, and narrative dimensions in relation to contemporary social issues.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design employed in the study was qualitative and interpretative to comprehend the process of constructing the stories of justice and power within the legal texts. The study was conducted through an interdisciplinary design that drew from the methodologies of law, literature, and socio-legal discourse analysis. Such design was selected because the purpose of the research design was to explore meaning, representations, and interpretive structures within the language of law rather than quantifying observable phenomena. Judicial writings were regarded neither as legal texts nor as discursive and narrative texts; therefore, it became possible to explore the role played by legal reasoning, narration, and rhetoric in the constitution of legal consciousness.

### **2.2. DATA SOURCE**

The core data of the study consisted of a great number of Supreme Court decisions which were in the English language, which covered a number of decades and the various branches of law such as constitutional, criminal and civil cases. Such texts were chosen since the Supreme Court decisions are the pinacol of judicial authority and present detailed, well-grounded descriptions of such cases that define legal principles, interpret legislative acts, and decide intricate cases. The data consisted of full-length decisions, which were analysed in detail in terms of argumentation, narrative, and pattern of language. This relied on the use of English-language judgments to create consistency in textual analysis and to engage in a close reading of legal discourse, especially in the context of the current English texts in the focus of the study. In addition, court rulings were viewed to be particularly appropriate in this study since they reflect institutional viewpoints of justice, power, rights and governance (Vxrun sonii). (2026).

### **2.3. SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

A purposive and criterion-based sampling method was employed in the selection of relevant texts in the dataset. Since our theme of interest in the study included such aspects as justice, power, legal consciousness, and discourse of rights, we focused the selection process around the same. Firstly, a general screening for keywords such as 'justice,' 'equality,' 'liberty,' 'authority,' 'rights,' 'state,' 'power,' and 'constitutional principles' was conducted. In this manner, we were able to reduce the bulk of the dataset and narrow it down to those judgments that related to matters that were central to our research objectives. Once the selection process was completed, the next step involved a close read of the selected judgments with an eye on the depth of storytelling, complex reasoning ability, and social-legal relevance of the selected pieces. Those criminal cases which provided a developed narrative, strong judicial reasoning, and a critical analysis of the concepts of justice and power were accorded special preference.

### **2.4. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Multi-dimensional methods were used in the analysis where theory of legal consciousness, narrative analysis and discourse analysis were incorporated. The nature of events created by the judicial texts, arguments created in them, and the legal conflicts and solutions described in the texts were evaluated using narrative analysis. Issues like plot, characters (including the state, citizen, victim, accused) and voices were considered and incorporated during meaning creation. Discourse analysis was used to evaluate the linguistic processes that are involved in the formation of the power of law, its legitimacy and its institution. This involved a keen analysis of the words used, rhetoric and argumentation used in judgments to come up with an understanding of how legal reasoning is shaped and presented. The theoretical framework used in this research was based on legal consciousness. It aided in assessing how the legal texts shaped the perceptions of law, justice, and rights within society. The theoretical framework made it possible for the assessment of the form and content of legal texts, as well as their socio-cultural implications, to be comprehensive due to the incorporation of all these aspects.

## 2.5. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Data analysis involved a stepwise process whereby the data obtained from the selected decisions were analysed systematically and iteratively. First, there was a close reading of the text to establish recurring themes and discursive issues related to concepts of justice, power and legality. During this stage, it was necessary to make some initial observations about the major issues. In the second stage, the data were analysed using the coding process in which different segments of the text were analysed based on the major themes such as narratives of justice, representations of power, legal arguments, discourses on rights and institutional legitimacy. Codes developed at this stage were grouped under broader categories for thematic analysis. The analysis involved a repetitive and iterative process in order to allow the emergence of themes and refine them accordingly. Finally, an interpretive analysis was done in which the interactions between themes were discussed in order to understand how they build up the legal consciousness. This phase entailed synthesizing data from different cases analyzed to find a pattern in discourses on justice and power.

## 3. RESULTS

During the qualitative analysis of the selected Supreme Court decisions, it was discovered that the judicial texts not only determine the law, but also expose complex narrative, rhetorical and discursive practices in which the meanings of justice, power and law are articulated and justified. Based on the findings, the texts simultaneously operate at a number of planes: as a legal argument, as a narrative story, and as a socio-cultural text, and therefore contribute to the formation of legal consciousness. The findings are grouped into four thematic areas which are related in interplay: narratives of justice, representations of power, construction of legal consciousness, and thematic interconnections.

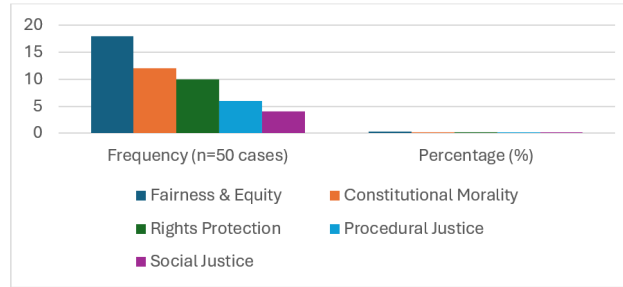
### 3.1. NARRATIVES OF JUSTICE

The discussion revealed that justice in judicial texts was created as a dynamic, interpretive and contextualized phenomenon and not as a procedural or rule-constrained result. Court cases were often narrated in a systematic fashion consisting of introduction of the factual situation, a normative interaction with the law, and a logical conclusion. It was sort of a story, and the conflict, judgment and settlement were well developed to create a justifiable story of right and wrong. The language of normativity and constitutionality became a typical way in which justice was determined with emphasis on the following values; fairness, equity, dignity, and reasonableness. The provisions of the constitution were not only applied by the courts as a legal requirement, but also as a moral and ethical standard, which also helped to develop the idea of justice beyond the technical legality. This framing of narratives put the judiciary in a moral and institutional position to interpret and safeguard fundamental values. Moreover, the application of precedents and previous rulings was important in the creation of stories about justice. The reasoning of judges often used previous cases, a continuity and stability in the interpretation of the law. This intertextual narrative technique helped to build justice as a developing but consistent pattern, based on the experience of legal wisdom. Simultaneously, the selective application of precedents implied that justice was open to interpretation and contextual modification as well, which reflected the malleability of legal reasoning.

**Table 1**

Table 1 Thematic Distribution of Justice Narratives		
Theme	Frequency (n=50 cases)	Percentage (%)
Fairness & Equity	18	36%
Constitutional Morality	12	24%
Rights Protection	10	20%
Procedural Justice	6	12%
Social Justice	4	8%

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** Distribution of Justice Themes

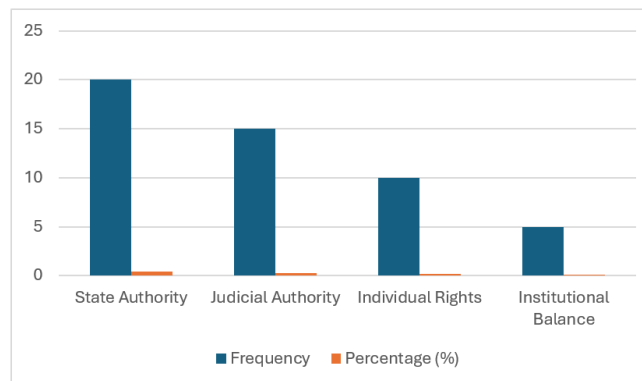
### 3.2. REPRESENTATIONS OF POWER

It was found that judicial texts were important locations of power articulation, negotiation and legitimization. Power existed in various forms such as state authority, judicial authority and institutional control which was always reflected in the vocabulary as well as the framework of legal reasoning. State power was commonly depicted in a twofold way as necessary to governance and to be limited by law. Judicial discourses focused on the need of state power to preserve order and enforce law and at the same time focus on the role of judicial power to check and balance that power. This two-fold representation cemented the equilibrium of governance and accountability and placed the judiciary as a negotiator of power and justice. Even the authority of the judiciary was built up by use of rhetoric techniques that stressed objectivity, rationality and legitimacy. Formal language, logical order, and comprehensive arguments helped to present the courts decision as an objective and authoritative one. Nonetheless, the analysis has also shown that this power was not entirely neutral; on the contrary, it was discursively constructed, basing on convincing rhetoric and logical organization of reasoning in order to legitimize results. Moreover, the judging hierarchy and power relation were realized through the narrative placement of actors in judgments including the state, the individual and institutions. The terms employed to characterize these actors tended to have a larger socio-political aspect such as questions of dominance, susceptibility and opposition. By doing so, the judicial texts were not only a mirror of power structures, but also a constitutive and reinforcing power structure.

**Table 2**

Table 2 Representation of Power in Judicial Narratives		
Type of Power	Frequency	Percentage (%)
State Authority	20	40%
Judicial Authority	15	30%
Individual Rights	10	20%
Institutional Balance	5	10%

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2** Power Representation in Legal Texts

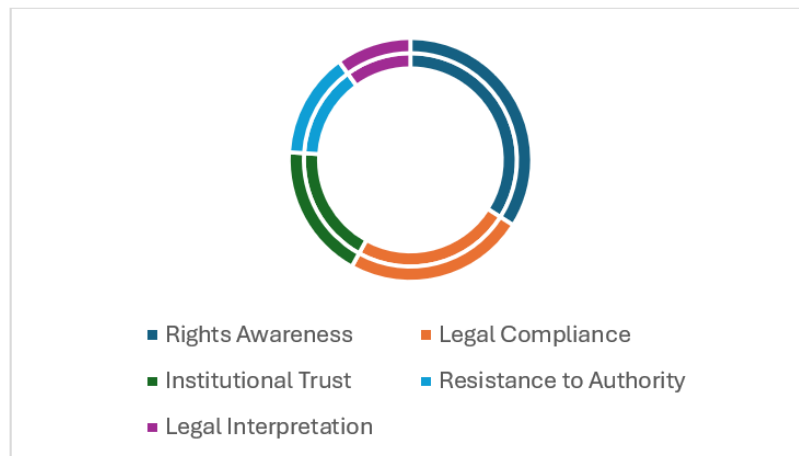
### 3.3. CONSTRUCTION OF LEGAL CONSCIOUSNESS

One of the main results of the research was that judicial texts were important in the development of legal consciousness which could be defined as the perception, interpretation, and internalization of law in the society. Judgments helped to create a certain vision of law as a legitimate, rational, and authoritative through their narrative and discursive characteristics. Legal consciousness was reflected in how the rights, duties and responsibilities were stated in judgments. This constant focus on fundamental rights bolstered the view of law as a protective order, and the mention of obligations and social order underscored its regulatory role. This dual focus helped to represent law as both enabling and limiting, which defines the relationship between individuals and institutions and the legal norms. The logical and persuasive nature of the language of the judicial language also affected, however, the perception of the legal judgements by the more general audience. The decisions were rendered by providing arguments in a clear and systematic way that created the impression of coherence and inevitability and hence, rendered them more legitimate. Such frankness of the story was significant in the establishment of trust which was entrusted to the law institutions and in the construction of the authority of legal discourse. The analysis also showed that the legal consciousness was not fixed as well but was an object of constant production and reproduction at the hands of the judicial narratives. These judgments were in addition part of a continuing meaning making process according to which, all interpretations of justice, power and law were negotiated and renegotiated based on shifting social circumstances.

**Table 3**

Table 3 Elements of Legal Consciousness		
Element	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Rights Awareness	17	34%
Legal Compliance	12	24%
Institutional Trust	9	18%
Resistance to Authority	7	14%
Legal Interpretation	5	10%

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3** Legal Consciousness Patterns

### 3.4. THEMATIC INTERCONNECTIONS

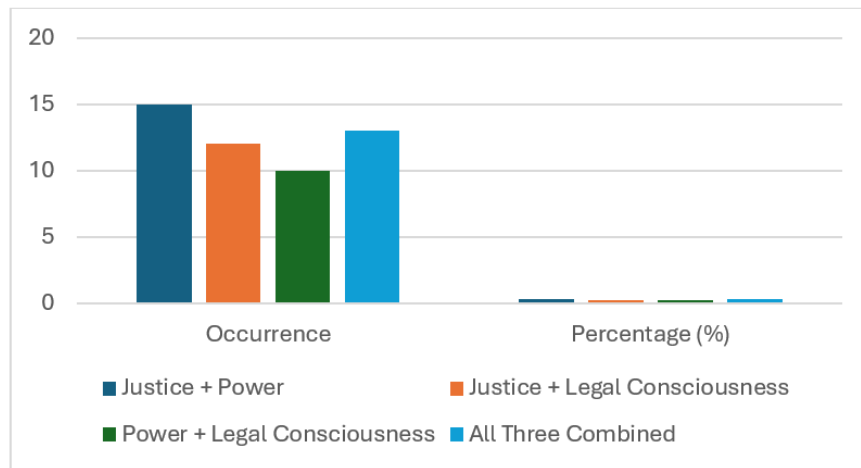
The most significant fact regarding the results was the mutual interdependence of justice, power and legal consciousness of the courts literature. These themes did not occur in a vacuum but were mixed throughout the text and discussion of judgments. To demonstrate this, the control and rationalization of power became a common characteristic of the creation of justice and courts tried to reconcile the power and justice. Likewise, the expression of power was directly related to the power of legal thinking too and which also shaped the legal consciousness. This interdependence illuminated the complexity of narrative in law, in the sense of there being multiple facets of meaning produced simultaneously. The analysis also indicated that even the texts of the judiciary was a negotiating and contending area

where conflicting interpretations of the law and justice were tabled, negotiated and decided. This procedure highlighted the dynamism of legal talk and laid down the fact that definition of justice and power is not static: it is constantly constructed in the process of interpretive practices.

**Table 4**

Table 4 Interrelationship Between Core Themes		
Theme Combination	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Justice + Power	15	30%
Justice + Legal Consciousness	12	24%
Power + Legal Consciousness	10	20%
All Three Combined	13	26%

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** Thematic Interconnection Model

On the whole, the results indicated that Supreme Court decisions are complicated narrative and discursive schemata that construct and articulate justice, power, and law senses. Justice was represented as a contextual, dynamic concept, the manifestation of power was as an institutionalized rationale and justification of such rationale, and the formation of legal consciousness was in the interaction of language, narrative and institutional power. These remarks confirm a view that the texts of the law are not technical instruments only, but cultural and interpretive specimens, which reflect more general social, political and ideological practices. As legal and narrative texts, judicial texts are at the centre of contemporary concepts of law and how it interacts with society.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

An analysis of judicial texts on the basis of law and literature exposes a multifaceted interaction between the narrative construction, institutional power, and the meaning of a socio-cultural context. The trends observed in the analysis prove that the legal discourse is not a self-sufficient technical field but it is entrenched within larger mechanisms of meaning, communication and power. The rhetoric-based structure of judgments is indicative of an attempt to create a rhetorical and narrative structure to legal reasoning that is persuasive and authoritative, which confirms the previous findings that legal rules tend to be influenced and expressed in the format of rhetoric and narrative, but not only in the format of abstract logic (Paskey, 2021).

The fact that fairness, constitutional morality, and reasoning based on rights are dominant in the judicial narratives denotes that courts always place themselves in the role of interpreters of legal and moral values. This is consistent with more general views on legal theory that highlight the importance of narrative in determining the meaning of law especially in situations whereby legal decisions need to balance in the competing interests and values (Hilson, 2022). This continuity of narrative is further enhanced by the dependency on precedent and this implies that legal reasoning is

built out of a law-making dialogue with previous renderings. With this kind of intertextuality, there is emphasis upon the fact that justice is relative and is thus constantly redefined by interpretive practices.

The personification of authority in the readings of judiciary is a complex negotiation of authority and limitation. The very common pronouncement of the power of the state and the juridical control indicate that legal discourse both grants and limits institutional power. This duality corresponds to the socio-legal conceptualizations of legal consciousness where law is regarded as an instrument of control and a way of defending rights (Feddersen et al., 2024). The courts as the judges of power are perceived to strengthen their institutional legitimacy not only do they demonstrate the way power is produced discursively through the language and reason and not through power.

The derivation of trends in legal consciousness that is formed as an outcome of analysis represents even further the way in which the discourses of judicial are applied to shape the image of law in society. The focus on rights consciousness and institutional reliability indicates the contribution of legal discourse to the development of the sense of legitimacy and coherence. Simultaneously, the fact that the themes of resistance and contestation are present suggests that legal consciousness is not universal and that it is different in different situations and experiences. This is in line with empirical research that has revealed that people approach law differently, by complying to law to critiquing it based on their social and political location (De Hart and Besselsen, 2021; Hilbink and Ramos, 2024). These perceptions are supported by the linguistic and rhetorical aspects of judicial texts. The legal English is structured and formal, which adds to the establishment of authority because it puts the arguments in a way that seems logical, objective and unavoidable (Griffin, 2024). Nonetheless, discourse-oriented studies indicate that even that neutrality is a linguistic and rhetorical decision, which influences the meaning delivery and perception (Goźdz-Roszkowski, 2020). Reconstructions of legal meaning through narrative structuring and textual organization is also illustrated by the fact that the courtroom discourse is transformed into written judgments (Zhang and Wang, 2025).

The interaction between legal consciousness, justice and power is also indicative of larger socio-political processes. The legal discourses tend to reflect the hierarchies and inequalities present, even trying to overcome or lessen them. It is especially noticeable in situations, in which the matter of identity, race, and marginalization come in conflict with legal interpretation. Through critical approaches to law and literature, there are ways in which law and literature can challenge the dominant ideologies as well as reproduce them, in response to how the claims are framed and which voices are heard (Stern, 2025). In a similar manner, trauma and agency research highlights the relevance of narrative in expressing a sense of vulnerability and resistance, and as such, legal discourse may be a place of both acknowledgment and challenge (Acar, 2023).

Spatial and political aspects of legal discourse also focus on impacting the connection between law and power. The influence of court rulings can be observed in bigger systems of governance and territoriality, and the use of power in different situations (Marini, 2025). This underscores how much law is encompassed in a set of political organization and social control, so as to support the concept of law as a practice of culture and institutionality.

All said and done, the nexus of narrative and discourse, together with the legal consciousness approach is a more detailed way of understanding of the meaning-making of judicial writing. The results imply that the legal discourse is not only a manifestation of the social reality, but a part of the process of its formation that shapes the perception and practice of justice, power and rights. Such a plan corresponds to the journal concern with critical thinking about questions of the day, since it prefigures the contribution of law to the answer (and even in certain instances, the recreation) of more general questions of inequality, politics, and social change.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Interdisciplinary law and literature approach of judicial narratives reveals that legal texts are not entirely an instrument of decision making, but the instrument of culture and interpretation which creates a sense of justice, power, and authority. It has been demonstrated in the discussion that Supreme Court rulings are created as a rational narrative in which legal arguments are interlaced with moral, constitutional as well as rhetoric elements. Justice was understood as a situational and changing concept that was developed in the form of the balance between the rights, institutional priorities, and societal values. The paper also mentioned that power in legal discourse is articulated and controlled by means of language. The texts of the judiciary authorize the state power as well as affirming the judiciary in limiting the state power and thus strengthening institutional balance. This doubled role highlights the significance of law as a place of negotiation of authority as opposed to imposition of authority. Moreover, the results focus on the significance of

judicial language in legal consciousness formation, and its impact on the way people and institutions understand law, rights, and justice. The legal texts assist in creating trust, legitimacy, and interaction with the legal systems through systematic reasoning and persuasion techniques. Meanwhile, the fact that competing interpretations are present in the judgments is indicative of the fact that the law is dynamic and contested in nature. Overall, the paper leads to the better comprehension of law as a story and cultural practice that is consistent with modern critical methods that place legal discourse in the context of a wider social and political discourse. It is also employed in supporting the relevance of interdisciplinary analysis in addressing the existing problems of justice, inequality and institutional power.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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