



Language Anxiety: Conflict and Change in the History of English

By Tim William Machan



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This book looks at the ever-present anxieties associated with language change. Focusing on English from Alfred the Great to the present, Tim Machan offers a fresh perspective on the history of language. He reveals amusing and sometimes disconcerting aspects of our linguistic and social behavior and suggests that anxiety about language has sometimes allowed us to avoid the issues we really find disturbing: when speakers of English worry over grammar, sounds, or words the real source of their anxiety is often not language at all but issues like immigration or social instability.

Drawing on an array of evidence from archives, literature, history, polemics, and the press, as well as centuries of legislation, Tim Machan uncovers the perennial nature of concerns about the poverty and purity of English. There has never been a time, he shows, when we weren't worried about the corruption of language and its apparent connections with educational standards, the morality of youth, the integrity of society, and the identity of our nations. This is a fascinating story, told here in consummate fashion, combining insight and anecdote, and learning with wit - a book for everyone interested in languages and the people who speak them.

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Editorial Review

Review

"An impressive book making a persuasive case, with a wealth of evidence being presented from many domains."--*Year's Work in English Studies*

"This is an excellent book. The subject matter is extremely interesting, the book is well-written, and the arguments are carefully crafted." --*eLanguage*

"Machan's work is perhaps as valuable for the extraordinary assembly of historical commentary on language change as for his essential thesis that language anxiety is symptomatic of anxiety about other major tumultuous events in society, including the demise of national identity through immigration, social dissolution in general, or the shoring up of power and privilege by those who already have it. It is a truly fascinating book."--*Discourse and Society*

About the Author

Tim William Machan is Professor of English at Marquette University. He has published extensively on medieval language and literature and has edited texts in Middle English, Old Norse, Latin, and French. His books include *Textual Criticism and Middle English Texts* (University Press of Virginia, 1994), *English in its Social Contexts* (edited with C. T. Scott, OUP, 1992), *English in the Middle Ages* (OUP 2003, paperback edition 2005), *Sources of the 'Boece'* (Georgia, 2005), and *Chaucer's 'Boece'* (Carl Winter, 2008).

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