

# (Un)Critical Literacies on the Net?

## Culture Jamming and the Geopolitics of English

HKU Constituent Theme-  
Languages, Media & Communication:  
Language in Education & Assessment Seminar Series

Speaker

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### Abstract

The Internet has become a crucial site for anti-globalization activity: from the mobilization of IMF and World Bank protesters to digitized forms of “writing/imaging back” that undermine market-based images and texts. The extent to which this latter activity—termed *culture jamming*—disrupts global capitalism is uncertain. Culture jamming subverts by way of humorous imitation. Circulated via the Web, however, the localized, intertextual allusions that support this strategy can be lost, resulting in weakened and contradictory modes of “writing back”.

An intriguing example is the website *Engrish.com*, which celebrates the “error”/creativity of Japanese learners/users of English. Through carnivalistic laughter, *Engrish.com* undermines the standardized codes of the centre-based ELT industry. Yet, the most humorous examples—hence exotic, from an Anglo-centric perspective—are selected for branding on products available for purchase on-line. Thus, while “writing back”, these sites also align with the dominant social, cultural and economic practices that underpin globalization.

Dr Brian Morgan’s current research interests include theory and practice in critical applied linguistics, particularly for EAP settings; critical media literacies/ multiliteracies in ELT; language, culture, and identity; community-based adult ESL, and language teacher education. His publication has appeared in journals such as the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, and the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*. Along with Vaidehi Ramanathan, Dr Morgan is the co-editor of the forthcoming 2007 *TESOL Quarterly* Special Issue on Language Policy Enactments in TESOL.

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