

difficult to navigate and understand than they could be. They can discourage users from exploring the site, which is a shame. For such a useful tool there needs to be more excitement when you first enter.

Conclusion

From a student's perspective, *English360* can be a very exciting tool to work with. The use of pictures, video clips, news articles and websites as a part of our online Business, Aviation and General English courses makes the learning experience far more stimulating than some of more traditional materials. For students around the world who are not able to study in an English-speaking country this type of course is a perfect tool.

Our students nowadays look for an emphasis on reviewing and analysing their progress in order to pass crucial English exams and the *English360* marking system gives students the chance to do that at every stage.

From a teacher's perspective the software has been set up in a common-sense way and anticipates the less technologically minded teacher's errors. Silly errors are highlighted immediately so they can be corrected before they become a major problem. This is particularly important for a first-time producer of internet-based lessons.

Despite the few teething errors and design issues that *English360* has had for us, it is providing a new focus for our teaching methods and materials creation. It is something that the teaching staff in our school are very excited about now they have overcome the initial fear of using the technology.

Tony Doyle

Tony Doyle worked for four years in Japan and has worked for OISE Bristol since 2003.

Editor's note

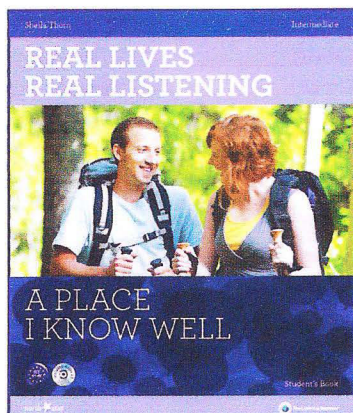
Teachers should be aware of copyright issues and are prompted to check for any possible infringement of copyright when uploading material to the *English360* platform.

A Place I Know Well (Intermediate)

Sheila Thorn

The Listening Business 2009: <http://www.thelisteningbusiness.com>

See page 92 for details



A Place I Know Well is part of *Real Lives, Real Listening*, whose texts are 100% unscripted and include over 100 native and non-native speaker accents. It is designed to provide teachers with materials which “effectively train, rather than just test” listening skills, boost students’ confidence by “exposing them to authentic texts” and “grammatical structures and lexis which are typically used in spoken English”. The conversations have been recorded in a variety of settings, even a pub, to add to the authenticity of the listening experience. The topics are where people live and home countries.

The series currently includes two other titles: *My Family* and *A Typical*

Day, each of which is divided into three levels: foundation (KET/PET), Intermediate (FCE/CAE) and Advanced (CAE/CPE), with four further volumes planned, namely: *Health Issues*, *Careers*, *Life Changes* and *Leisure*. The Student's Book comes with a CD, which includes the entire text in Word format to minimise copying; there's also a Teacher's Book, with basic teacher's notes and answers.

Each volume follows a uniform structure of five units, each based around a different authentic listening text. The first three units are graded from easy to more challenging according to the speed of delivery, accent and complexity of language. The last two units are for revision, with speakers recycling the lexis and structures found in the first three units. However, in terms of format and content, the difference between the first and last units is not obvious.

Each lesson follows a fairly uniform format, starting with a pre-listening section, which can be found in the Teacher's Book. It starts with language that could usefully be 'pre-taught', followed by a semi-predictive discussion based largely around how much students know about the country of origin of the speaker and the speaker's accent. There is a fact list about the country, which could be adapted and included in the pre-listening activities. The next stage is a pre-listening comprehension task, designed to familiarise the students with the speaker's accent, a process called 'normalisation'. This involves listening

and completing a comprehension-check task. After this, the students move on to the listening comprehension section proper, which offers between three and six sets of standard listening comprehension exercises, from which the teacher is encouraged to pick and choose according to their students' needs, to get students to listen for detail rather than gist. These activities, despite their lack of variety, are useful and especially useful for teachers of exams classes, as students are required to predict answers and process language in much the same way.

Then comes Part three: interesting language points. These points vary from an explanation of different tenses or verbs (*have to/have got to*), to a study of different aspects of the speakers' accents (e.g. the rising Australian intonation), to interesting language features such as: *cos*, native speaker errors, colloquial language and imprecision. The information in this section has great value and will help students to understand unfamiliar accents and unravel a few language mysteries. However, one element that lets this fantastic section down is that for many language points there is merely a presentation, with few follow-up opportunities for practice. It is therefore down to the teacher to create their own activities. In addition, I would have liked to have seen more work here on elements such as colloquial English and conversation markers, rather than the work on grammar, which students will get elsewhere.

Part four, Further Listening Practice, is designed to focus on listening training and includes activities which read like

a teacher's listening practice wish list: sentence stress, intonation, linking and assimilation, contractions, weak forms, the glottal stop and minimal pairs. However, as perfect as this list seems, what happens in this part of the book is that while there is lots of practice, there isn't much in-depth presentation or explanation. So what teachers will need to do here is present and explain the points themselves, before practising them using the activities in the book. It's also worth noting that, in general, the minimal pairs activities are not a contrast of two sounds, but include a number of different minimal pair types, so students will need a good general grounding before doing them.

The next section is Language Development Practice and is designed to recycle lexis from the listening text. Key words from the text are selected and checked. Students are then required to substitute words in a sentence with the key words from the unit. Finally, in Part six, there is a presentation of the full transcript and a glossary of tricky vocabulary. Here my critical mind can't help but wonder whether it might make more sense to have the vocabulary activity follow an analysis of the transcript but, anyway, the Glossary is a useful addition.

So, overall, these materials are interesting for two main reasons. First, it is one of the only texts I am familiar with which uses authentic-authentic listenings. The importance of this cannot be underestimated. Not only does it expose students to natural, rather than scripted English, but it also engages students far more than the traditional textbook listenings,

which include voices students have heard a hundred times. My students ears pricked up when I told them the listening material was genuine. The second reason this book is so interesting is the work it includes on listening training, which will be new, interesting and helpful to the vast majority of students. Although, there will need to be a fair amount of adaptation on the part of teachers, this material is a valuable and engaging resource.

Lottie Galpin

Lottie Galpin is a freelance teacher and materials developer based in London

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