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Home robots on sale in Japan

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17 September, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Home robots on sale in Japan

BNE: A Japanese company started selling a futuristic home robot on September 16. The meter-high humanoid may make housework a thing of the past – for the rich. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries put its internet-linked Wakamaru robot on sale at a price of \$150,000. Just 100 of these home helps will initially be available. The robot is the idea of Japanese designer Toshiyuki Kita. He said his creation was “designed in the shape of a human being so that it is not considered simply a machine” and that it has an “independent personality”.

The robot has an impressive number of features. It is capable of recognizing up to ten individuals by name and has a vocabulary of 10,000 words. It can also navigate its way around the house. The Wakamaru website* explains three major functions that will help the lives of the robot’s users: It can live with the family and provide daily schedules; it can speak with the family and be a friend; and it has its own role of looking after the house when no one is home. However, the price needs to come down to make it affordable by all.

*<http://www.mhi.co.jp/kobe/wakamaru/english/index.html>

WARM-UPS

1. I'M A ROBOT: You are now a robot. Decide what you can do and what your major functions are. Walk around the class and talk to other "robots" about your lives.

2. HOME ROBOT: If you had a home robot, what would you want it to do? Look at the following functions and features and talk about which ones you like.

- a. The robot can talk. It has a vocabulary of 10,000 words.
- b. It can recognize your face and say "good morning".
- c. It can tell you when you have e-mail and read it to you.
- d. When you are not at home, it will e-mail you if a burglar enters your house.
- e. You can see what it sees with its camera on your cell phone.
- f. It makes toast and coffee in the morning.
- g. It gives you advice on what to wear to work / school / a party.
- h. It will answer and open the front door.

3. MOVIES: In pairs / groups, talk to your partner about robot movies. Here is a list of some films: *RoboCop*, *Terminator*, *Matrix*, *Inspector Gadget*, *The Six-Million Dollar Man*, *The Bionic Woman*, *AI (Artificial Intelligence)*, *Bladerunner*, *Tron*, *I, Robot* ... Talk about robotic characters in your own country.

4. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Japanese manufacturers / futuristic homes / home robots / housework / Mitsubishi / human beings / machines / large vocabulary / daily schedules / prices

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

5. ROBOT: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "robot". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

6. 2-MINUTE DEBATES: Have the following (for-fun) 2-minute debates. Students A take the first argument, students B the second. Change partners often.

- a. Robots will control us one day. vs. Impossible.
- b. Robots will give us more free time. vs. Something else will take up our time.
- c. Robots are scary. vs. Don't be ridiculous.
- d. Robots will make us lazier and fatter. vs. Robots will help us exercise.
- e. Robots will be more intelligent than us. vs. We will always be more intelligent.
- f. One day, it will be difficult to tell humans and robots apart. vs. Impossible.
- g. Robots will attack humans in the future. vs. Impossible.
- h. Robots will always be too expensive for most people. vs. Prices will come down.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. You can now buy a robot in convenience stores in Japan. | T / F |
| b. Housework has become a thing of the past in Japan. | T / F |
| c. A new robot is on sale in Japan for \$150,000. | T / F |
| d. The robot has an independent personality. | T / F |
| e. The robot has a vocabulary of 10,000 words. | T / F |
| f. The robot can help its owners become rich and live longer lives. | T / F |
| g. The robot will give you your daily schedule. | T / F |
| h. The robot will relax and watch television when no one is at home. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. futuristic | at first |
| b. humanoid | duty |
| c. initially | maneuver |
| d. idea | remarkable |
| e. simply | advanced |
| f. impressive | supply |
| g. individuals | concept |
| h. navigate | robot |
| i. provide | people |
| j. role | just |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. a futuristic | helps will initially be available |
| b. make housework a thing | when no one is home |
| c. Just 100 of these home | personality |
| d. designed in the | lives of the robot's users |
| e. independent | of the past |
| f. The robot has an impressive | way around the house |
| g. It can also navigate its | make it affordable by all |
| h. functions that will help the | home robot |
| i. looking after the house | number of features |
| j. the price needs to come down to | shape of a human being |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Home robots on sale in Japan

BNE: A Japanese company _____ selling a futuristic home robot on September 16. The meter-high humanoid may _____ housework a thing of the past – for the _____. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries put its internet-linked Wakamaru robot on sale at a price of \$150,000. Just 100 of these home helps will _____ be available. The robot is the _____ of Japanese designer Toshiyuki Kita. He said his creation was “designed in the _____ of a human being so that it is not considered _____ a machine” and that it has an “independent _____”.

The robot has an _____ number of features. It is capable of _____ up to ten individuals by name and has a _____ of 10,000 words. It can also _____ its way around the house. The Wakamaru website explains three _____ functions that will help the lives of the robot’s _____. It can live with the family and provide daily schedules; it can speak with the family and be a friend; and it has its own role of _____ after the house when no one is home. However, the price needs to come down to make it _____ by all.

make
shape
personality
started
initially
simply
rich
idea
vocabulary
looking
users
navigate
impressive
affordable
major
recognizing

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'home' and 'help'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "ROBOT" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about robots and their roles in our future.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| • selling | • impressive |
| • past | • navigate |
| • price | • major |
| • shape | • schedules |
| • machine | • looking after |
| • independent | • affordable |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What did you think when you first read this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. What do you think about Wakamaru?
- d. What do you think of the idea of robots?
- e. Do you think robots will become more intelligent than humans?
- f. Do you think it will become difficult to tell humans and robots apart?
- g. What would you want your robot to look like?
- h. What would you want your robot to do?
- i. How much would you pay for a very useful robot?
- j. Would you want your robot to have an independent personality?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What adjectives describe your feelings about this article?
- d. Do you think you would ever be afraid of a robot?
- e. When do you think robots will be as common as cars?
- f. Do you think you would have conversations with a robot?
- g. Do you think a home robot would make your life better?
- h. Are you interested in robots?
- i. Do you want a Wakamaru robot?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

MARVEL ROBOT: You are the boss of the Marvel Robot company. You must design a new robot to compete with Mitsubishi's Wakamaru robot. In pairs / groups, decide on the areas written in the column on the left:

AREAS	DECISIONS
Name	
Shape	
Communication	
Ability to recognize people	
Functions	
Mobility	
Secret ability	

Change partners and show each other what your robot designs. Give each other feedback on how to make the robots better.

Present your designs to other groups. Ask and answer questions.

Vote on the best robot.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the Wakamaru robot. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. MY ROBOT: Make the plans for your own robot. Explain all of its features and functions. Show your plans to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all have similar ideas?

4. DIARY / JOURNAL: You are Wakamaru. Write your diary / journal entry for one day in your life. Write about your feelings towards your owner. Read your diary / journal to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. F c. T d. T e. T f. F g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. futuristic | advanced |
| b. humanoid | robot |
| c. initially | at first |
| d. idea | concept |
| e. simply | just |
| f. impressive | remarkable |
| g. individuals | people |
| h. navigate | maneuver |
| i. provide | supply |
| j. role | duty |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. a futuristic | home robot |
| b. make housework a thing | of the past |
| c. Just 100 of these home | helps will initially be available |
| d. designed in the | shape of a human being |
| e. independent | personality |
| f. The robot has an impressive | number of features |
| g. It can also navigate its | way around the house |
| h. functions that will help the | lives of the robot's users |
| i. looking after the house | when no one is home |
| j. the price needs to come down to | make it affordable by all |

GAP FILL:

Home robots on sale in Japan

BNE: A Japanese company **started** selling a futuristic home robot on September 16. The meter-high humanoid may **make** housework a thing of the past – for the **rich**. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries put its internet-linked Wakamaru robot on sale at a price of \$150,000. Just 100 of these home helps will **initially** be available. The robot is the **idea** of Japanese designer Toshiyuki Kita. He said his creation was “designed in the **shape** of a human being so that it is not considered **simply** a machine” and that it has an “independent **personality**”.

The robot has an **impressive** number of features. It is capable of **recognizing** up to ten individuals by name and has a **vocabulary** of 10,000 words. It can also **navigate** its way around the house. The Wakamaru website explains three **major** functions that will help the lives of the robot's **users**: It can live with the family and provide daily schedules; it can speak with the family and be a friend; and it has its own role of **looking** after the house when no one is home. However, the price needs to come down to make it **affordable** by all.