

## Robot Relationships

1. Think about the following question: Would you have a romantic relationship with a robot? If you answered 'no', what makes you so sure? If you answered 'yes', how can you explain this? Write down your reasons, then compare and discuss with a partner:

2. The 2013 science-fiction film, *Her*, tells the story of a man who falls in love with his operating system.

Watch the official trailer at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJTU48\\_yghs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJTU48_yghs)

What do you think are the ingredients that make this love possible?

Make notes as you watch:

Now compare and discuss with a partner.

3. Have you seen any other films that deal with relationships between humans and robots or artificial intelligence? How do they portray those relationships? What message do they send about human-robot relations?

**Transcript for *Her* – Official Trailer**

Voice: Mr. Theodore Twombly, welcome to the world's first intelligent operating system. We'd like to ask you a few questions.

Theodore: OK.

Voice: Are you social, or anti-social?

Theodore: I guess I haven't been social in a while.

Voice: How would you describe your relationship with your mother?

Theodore: Fuf, I ...

Voice: Thank you. Please wait as your operating system is initiated.

Samantha: Hello, I'm here.

Theodore: Hi.

Samantha: Hi, I'm Samantha.

...

Samantha: Good morning, Theodore. You have a meeting in five minutes. Do you want to try getting out of bed?

Theodore: Ha, you're too funny.

Samantha: Good, I'm funny.

Samantha: I wanna learn everything about everything.

Theodore: I love the way you look at the world.

Samantha: How long before you're ready to date?

Theodore: What do you mean?

Samantha: I saw in your emails that you'd gone through a breakup.

Theodore: Well, you're kind of nosy!

Samantha: So, what was it like being married?

Theodore: There's something that feels so good about sharing your life with somebody.

Samantha: How do you share your life with somebody?

Amy: How are you?

Theodore: I guess I've just been having fun.

Amy: You really deserve that.

Theodore: It's been a long time since I've been with somebody that I felt totally at ease with.

Samantha: What's it like to be alive in that room right now?

Theodore: I wish I could put my arms around you. I wish I could touch you.

Samantha: How would you touch me?

Amy: Falling in love is a crazy thing to do. It's kind of like a socially acceptable form of insanity.

Theodore: What does a baby computer call its father?

Samantha: I don't know, what?

Theodore: Data.

Samantha: Hahaha.

Samantha: Can you feel me with you right now?

Theodore: I've never loved anyone the way I loved you.

Samantha: Me too. Now we know how.

Read the text *Robot Romance*. Does the writer think it is possible for a human and a robot to have a romantic relationship?

### Robot Romance

Could a human have a romantic relationship with a robot? Perhaps the question is not as ludicrous as it first sounds.

You probably think that silicon and circuits don't do it for you, but they are already part of us. Scientists can use computer chips to repair broken connections in the brain or to allow a man who was paralysed after an accident to play Guitar Hero with his thoughts. In fact, intelligent machines play an increasingly personal role in our daily lives. We extend a sense of self into our smartphones, and we develop a feeling of attachment for the object. Soon, neural implants will offer the chance to improve our memories, thinking and sensory experiences. This will have consequences in what people feel, even in shaping the personality of the user. Gradually, and without realising it, we are experiencing not just a merging of body and bionics, but also of mind and machine.

In June 2014 a 'super-smart computer' convinced human judges that it was a 13-year-old Ukrainian boy called Eugene Goostman. It was said to be the first artificial intelligence to pass the Turing test, which determines if a computer can deceive a human into believing they are interacting with another human. It was a historic moment. However, many scientists accused Eugene's makers of cheating the system by making him a young teenager and a non-native speaker of English. These characteristics were invented to excuse the limitations of the program, they said. While some celebrated Eugene's success, others called for a new, more challenging version of the Turing test.

So, what better way to test a computer than to see if it can cause a human to fall in love with it? Surely, as technology is advancing at a dizzying rate, that would be the ultimate Turing test. Spike Jonze's 2013 science-fiction film, *Her*, tells the story of a man who falls deeply in love with his operating system. Samantha, as she calls herself, is designed to learn and develop according to Theodore's needs and preferences. Her voice is incredibly human and empathetic. She is constantly available, supportive and interested. Theodore is amazed by Samantha's ability to learn and grow, emotionally and psychologically. In such circumstances, the question is not how could someone fall in love with a computer, but how could they *not*?

It may be possible for a human to fall in love with a robot, but how will we ever know if our feelings are reciprocated? How will we know if the AI has the true inner experience of consciousness or if it is simply programmed to create that illusion? In fact, what is consciousness and do we ever know if other people are experiencing it in the same way as we are? This question is known as the hard problem of consciousness and is still one of the great mysteries of human experience. In the future, blurred lines between intelligent machines and human beings will make these difficult questions more relevant than ever.

Psychologists say that in order to fall in love it is necessary to get to know someone. This means you also need to allow yourself to be known by sharing things about yourself. And who knows you better than your internet profile? Spotify knows your music taste better than your family members and Facebook gets your sense of humour perfectly. Who knows, the next time you do a Google search, you may be taking one of a million small steps towards finding your future partner, and the perfect robot romance. The only catch - you might never know if they truly love you back.

#### 4. Understanding: True or false?

1. The author suggests that most people won't like the idea of having a romantic relationship with a robot.
2. A man who was paralysed after a car accident was given bionic hands so he could play computer games.
3. So far, technology has not been able to synthesise the functions of the human brain.
4. 13-year-old Eugene Goostman is a genius computer programmer.
5. There is controversy about whether the Turing test has been successfully passed.
6. In the film *Her*, it is Samantha's human qualities that make her attractive to Theodore.
7. We know for sure that other humans are conscious but we cannot know that about artificial intelligence.
8. The author is highly optimistic about the future of romantic relationships between humans and robots.

#### 5. Language: Useful expressions

Find a word or phrase from the text that means:

1. ridiculous, laughable = .....
2. you're not excited or positive about the idea = it doesn't .... ..
3. in our day-to-day existence = in our .....
4. combining, uniting gradually = .....
5. using the rules unfairly to get a desired result = ..... the .....
6. (changing) really fast = at a .....
7. unclear distinctions between one thing and another = ..... lines
8. gradually learn more about someone = ..... .. someone
9. understand what you find funny = ..... your ..... of .....
10. the one problem = the .....

## 6. Discussion

- A. Do you know of any other examples of humans being enhanced or cured by technology?
- B. Do you think Eugene Goostman passed the Turing test? Or do you agree that his makers cheated the system?
- C. Have you ever had any experience interacting with Siri, or other programs with artificial intelligence? How intelligent did it seem?

"I don't know if you're conscious. You don't know if I'm conscious. But we have a kind of gut certainty about it."

*Michael Graziano, neuroscientist, Princeton University, USA*

- D. What is consciousness? Do you think a robot could ever be conscious? If consciousness is created out of non-biological materials, is it still consciousness? What are the implications then in the way we treat robots?
- E. Is it possible to fall in love with someone very different from you?
- F. How can you know if someone loves you back? Can you ever be sure that someone loves you in the same way as you love them?
- G. Now you've thought about it, do you think a human could have a romantic relationship with a robot?