

2015 Autumn

CEL

# IntermediateCourse

Global News-Centered

Lesson 00



## Reading

[A]

First came the row over the design and cost of Japan's main stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Now a new, potentially more damaging, controversy has hit preparations — whether to allow “embarrassing” J-pop phenomenon AKB48 to perform at the opening ceremony.

The all-female band, whose high-pitched delivery of saccharine lyrics is accompanied by synchronised dance routines and outlandish costumes, comprise about 140 rotating members whose appearances in live and recorded performances often depend on their individual popularity among fans. Older singers “graduate” and are replaced by trainees selected at auditions held twice a year.

The furore began when their creator, Yasushi Akimoto, proposed choosing the best of the 48 stable to play on the world's biggest stage in five years. The proposal by Akimoto, who last year was controversially named to the executive board of the Olympic organising committee, drew a withering rebuke from TV celebrity and columnist Matsuko Deluxe, who said the idols would be “an embarrassment”.

Deluxe, who is best known for his cross-dressing TV persona, told a radio programme: “I absolutely don't want them to perform at the opening ceremony. As long as they aren't part of the opening or closing ceremony, I don't care what they do, but please use somebody for the opening and closing ceremonies that wouldn't be an embarrassment.”

AKB48's mooted appearance divided opinion on social media. One user called the wildly popular group “the shame of Japan.” Another posted on Japan Today: “AKB is not the image we want the world to have of Japan.” Another leaped to the group's defence, pointing out that they had raised money for relief efforts after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in north-eastern Japan and acted as ambassadors for Japan's “soft power” diplomacy.

In a 2013 poll seeking suggestions for artists to perform at the Olympics, the group finished a lowly seventh; topping the poll were the Southern All-Stars, a pop rock band that has been a fixture of the Japanese music since the 1970s.

## Study Guide

◆ row

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◆ outlandish

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◆ furore

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◆ rebuke

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◆ moot

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❖ (*para. 2, line 4*) Older singers “graduate” and are replaced by trainees selected at auditions held twice a year.

**Question:** What is the current controversy about?

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## Reading

[B]

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It's no secret that Uber CEO Travis Kalanick is a fan of self-driving cars. He's touted the futuristic technology in the past and has even said it could one day replace Uber's human drivers. So, it's not too far off base that Uber is now opening its own lab to do research and development on "autonomy technology."

Uber is a ride-hailing service that lets passengers use a smartphone to book rides from drivers who use their own cars. Wading into robotics territory is thus a completely new venture for the company. Besides autonomy technology, the new lab will also focus on mapping and vehicle safety. The lab is dubbed the Uber Advanced Technologies Center and will be located in Pittsburgh. Uber is partnering on the project with Carnegie Mellon University and will work with the school's faculty, staff and students — both on campus and at its associated National Robotics Engineering Center.

While opening a research lab seems like a costly endeavor, Uber has the cash to do it. The ride-hailing service has raised \$4.9 billion and is currently the highest valued venture-backed company in the world with a valuation of more than \$41 billion.

Since Uber is not an auto manufacturer, it may seem strange that it wants to get into the autonomy technology business. But, during an interview last May at the Code Conference, company CEO Kalanick praised self-driving cars, saying they could be safe, environmentally friendly and ultimately lower the cost of rides.

"The reason Uber could be expensive is you're paying for the other dude in the car," Kalanick said. "When there is no other dude in the car, the cost of taking an Uber anywhere is cheaper." When asked whether he was concerned about self-driving cars taking away jobs from Uber drivers, Kalanick said that's just the way it is. "If I were talking to one of the drivers we partner with, I'd say, 'Look, this is the way the world is going to go and if Uber didn't go that way, it won't exist,'" he said.

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## Study Guide

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◆ wade into

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◆ ride-hailing

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◆ autonomy

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◆ dude

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❖ (*para. 5, line 3*) When asked whether he was concerned about self-driving cars taking away jobs from Uber drivers, Kalanick said that's just the way it is

### True or False:

Uber is getting into the autonomy technology business, with an ultimate aim to compete with big car companies like Toyota and GM.

☐ True

☐ False

[Note Space]





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