



The Science of Swearing with Dr. Anne-Michelle Tessier

Nerdin' About Podcast Transcript, Season 3 Episode 5

Michael

Hey everyone, welcome to Nerdin' About! I'm Space Michael, and with me as always, is someone who loves a good sweater as we head into a sweater season, and that is Dr. Kaylee Byers.

Kaylee

I do love a good sweater. I'm knitting one right now, actually. I had an issue recently trying to knit a bobble that was not going the way I wanted. Do you know what a bobble is Michael?

Michael

A bobble head?

Kaylee

Kind of but with yarn. It is a well-knit tiny little ball and that sits like a little ball on your clothes. Do you have any sweaters with bobbles?

Michael

No, I'm not a big sweater fan. Although this year, I decided, and my mom was very weirded out about it. She was like, where did this come from? I think I'm going to get into turtlenecks this season, because it is kind of like a sweater that's also a shirt. I get hot, very easily, especially when I go inside. A sweater is too much, but a turtleneck I think I can do.

Kaylee

I'm actually surprised that you don't own a whole closet full of turtlenecks in various shades of black and white and gray, because of your hero Carl Sagan, that is surprising to me.

Michael

I have the red one that I pull out when I do the Carl Sagan, but now there's going to be lots of colors.

Kaylee

Okay, well, I'm really excited for you. I'm excited for one day when you get a bobble on your sweater. As we've just learned, bobbles can perhaps be multiple things. So, we're going to be learning about how words come together, some special kind of words. So today, we're joined by Dr. Anne-Michelle Tessier, who's an Associate Professor of Linguistics at UBC, and she's the Director of UBC's Child Phonology Lab. Hi, Anne-Michelle, how are you?

Anne-Michelle

I am very well. Thank you. It's exciting to be here.

Kaylee

We are delighted to have you, and fun fact, we were actually originally going to have you speak at a Nerd Nite right around the time that the pandemic happened. We were going to talk to you about the topic we're talking to you today about, so we are really excited, a year and a half later!



Anne-Michelle

Yes, it was fun fact that for quite some time was not a fun fact at all, and now, a little bit funner again.

Kaylee

Yeah, it's a little fun. (Laughs) So to start off, can you tell us what linguistics is?

Anne-Michelle

Yes, absolutely. So, the best way to explain what linguistics in that like 15 second sort of way, so that if someone asks you what you do for a living and you don't want them to ask you anything more, is that you tell them that you studied the mathematics of language. Then people say, "okay, great", and they stop. That is both true and misleading. So, I mean, it is very much the math and science of language, specifically the part of language that has to do with how we get our understanding of language into our minds and brains. It's not so much about how to learn a language or why people are necessarily good or bad at speaking languages or different languages, but it's really about what the structure that underlies languages is. What is it about being specifically a human, and having human capacities for learning languages and understanding languages and speaking them that gets all that information into our heads? I especially study how children learn languages. So, for me, it's really interesting how that process begins. It's also about how that stuff is represented in our heads, and then how that affects how we speak, how we talk, how we listen, how we understand, and how that breaks down, and how we make mistakes. Then also, how languages are different and similar and so on at a structural level.

Kaylee

How does the math come in there?

Anne-Michelle

So, we use a lot of formal representations for things. So, the math component of phonetics, which is the lowest level of language representation that we study, has to do with the actual facts about articulation and acoustics. So, you need to know things about the physics of the sound waves and so on, and what the human ear does with those, like the psycho acoustics, but then all the way up to formal representations of language meaning. Like what does the word, "the" mean? So, it turns out that it's actually useful. If you read a dictionary and you look up what the meaning of "the" is, there's a lot of words there, it's not always entirely clear what they all add up to. It turns out one way that linguists do that is actually trying to be really precise about what it means to be for example, salient. You say "the something", it usually means the most salient representation of that thing, you're only talking about one of them. So, we have these formal models that come from philosophy and other models that come from machine learning and try to represent what those meanings look like. The mathy or the science part about it is that then we make falsifiable predictions about well, if you think that that's what "the" means, and it shouldn't be grammatical in this sentence, and it should be in that one. Is that true? Yes? No? Crap. What do we do about it? Then across languages, what does "the" look like?

Kaylee

So, I think what kind of struck me there was, for everybody who has asked the question, "what good is math for in my everyday life?" You actually use it all the time when you're talking,



Anne-Michelle

Yes, indeed. Absolutely. Your brain is doing some fast math at all times. True.

Kaylee

I love it! Okay, so moving into something a little bit more specific. Today, we're going to dive into some of the science of swearing. So, before we get into some of the specifics of your work, is the linguistics of swearing just like a pretty hip field?

Anne-Michelle

Usually, the best evidence of whether a particular topic is hot is how many publications there are about it. Along that dimension, it's not so clear, there's not actually that much linguistic work on swearing. However, I will also say that this work that we're going to talk about is certainly the only work of mine that has either been tweeted about or retweeted about, but both of those things definitely happened, which was definitely only presented academically in a fairly niche area. So, it's not like people knew about it beforehand. So, from that perspective, yes, apparently so. It definitely does come up that people say to me, "Oh, are you the shitgibbon person?" So, this is my 15 minutes of fame, we're at minute 14.5 at the moment.

Michael

Well, we're definitely going to tweet and then retweet what we're going to be talking about today. So, let's get into this paper that you co-authored. This paper studies the phonological properties of shitgibbons, you already name-dropped this word shitgibbons, which you describe as a class of insulting English compounds made up of a monosyllabic obscenity followed by a trochaic innocuous noun. Would you break this down into some plain fucking English please? What is a shitgibbon?

Anne-Michelle

So first, I just need to point out my co-author who you mentioned there, Dr. Michael Becker. I said to him, "I'm going to go on this podcast and talk about this work. That's all right, right?" And he said, "Yes, everything that goes wrong, you can tell them you blame me." So that's excellent. So, a shitgibbon is a word that has a specific kind of English coinage, to my knowledge we don't have specifically this kind of swear word in other languages. So, it's two words put together into a compound, and the first word is just one syllable. So, the filthier the better, but depends, however you like, and you've got that one syllable word. So, for example, shit would do very well, and then the second word has to have a couple properties. It has to be two syllables. The first syllable has to be the one that's stressed. So "gibbon" works well, stress on the first syllable, as opposed to, for example, "guitar", which is a fairly similar word, but where the second syllable is stressed. So, it has to have these two syllables, the first one has to be stressed. Then semantically this one isn't a swear word on its own. I mean, gibbon is a little weird, because it is like calling someone a monkey already sounds a little insulting, but the best of these I think is usually where the second word is a fairly normalish word. So maybe an animal, or a food, or an object. So fucktrumpet is another really good one, and "trumpet" inherently isn't a swear. Or cockwaffle is another good one. Right? (Laughs) So just enjoyable words, they're just stuff. I will actually say that when we were designing the study, we're going to talk about the way that we picked the second words, is we just went through a lot of common emojis. So, we were looking at foods, and objects and animals, like that's how we did it. We were like, which of these can we use?

Michael

Oh, that's cool.



Kaylee

For some reason, I thought that some of them were pulled from common use?

Anne-Michelle

Well, I mean, common, the ones that were in any use that we could find. There's I think like four or five of them. Yeah, very few of them. Most of them we just invented.

Michael

So besides being very silly and fun, and from my standpoint, a reason to do anything.

Anne-Michelle

Accurate.

Michael

Why did you want to embark on this study and spend lots of time going through it?

Anne-Michelle

So, here's the thing, this particular swear word, shitgibbon, was used on the internet, and a bunch of people noted that it was pretty fun in 2018 I believe. Me and a few other linguists, including Michael Becker, but not only, had the observation that there's something particularly good about this set of them, and it's particularly good from the linguistics perspective. That is to say, as linguists we have an educated guess about why these particular insults sound so good. I will tell you in a minute what that was, but basically our goal was to see if we can quantify that and test it. Is our intuition, right? That these ones sound better than other similar insults for this phonological reason. Phonological meaning having to do specifically with the sound patterns. Spoiler alert: it worked. Okay, so we compared three of these: cockwaffle, shitgibbon, and fucktrumpet. Those three words, in addition to having those properties I said before with a one syllable, and then the two syllables with the stress, they also have the following property, that the swear word, the vowel in the swear word, and the vowel in the stressed syllable of the other word - so, the first syllable in that other word - they're the same vowel. So, in shitgibbon they're both "ih", in fucktrumpet they're both "uh", and then in cockwaffle the both "ah". Okay? So that makes them sound good. So, we might describe this as a harmony in lots of language systems in the world that are not swearing, they're just minding their own business building words. There are lots of languages that say, vowels nearby each other within a word or something like that have to share some similar properties. They don't necessarily need to be exactly the same, like they are here, but they have to share some properties. So, we were like, okay, I think that's what's going on, that this general fact about sound patterns is being grabbed by the English lexicon and being put to work in this place. We like things that sound the same, but specifically vowels if you cross match these words. So instead of shitgibbon, you think about shittrumpet, or shitwaffle, and then cocktrumpet, cockgibbon, these just don't sound as good. So, what we did is we ran this experiment, where we did a couple manipulations, we took a bunch of the swear words, and then these second words, and we mixed and matched them. We would ask people, "How funny does this insult sound to you? And also, how satisfying?" We weren't really sure how to get at this question. So those are the two questions we asked, and basically people gave us the same results. Like we got the same for both those questions, you could just conflate the data, it looked the same. We had people answer on a five-point scale, between rate this word's funniness, or this insult's funniness, and also, it's satisfyingness. Some of them were like shitgibbon where the vowels matched. Some of them were like shittrumpet where they didn't. Interestingly, we also picked ones like, shitshovel. So, cases where the vowels didn't match, but the first consonants did. So, both shit and shovel start with "sha", our hypothesis was across the



world's languages that "sha" matching isn't really a thing that language systems impose. Like in poems, you have alliteration, we have places where we like the consonants to be the same, but no grammatical system requires that the first consonant of adjacent syllables be exactly the same in precisely this way. So, we had a hypothesis that if this preference for the vowels to match is actually coming from the somehow unconscious, intuitive, built-in, phonological preferences, then the vowels matching should matter and those initial consonants matching shouldn't. That's what we found.

Kaylee

Question. Did you ever consider dickpickle?

Anne-Michelle

We absolutely did.

Kaylee

Thank you. (Laughs)

Anne-Michelle

We wanted it to be the case that we could really say it was the vowel. So, if we supposed that "shit" is just a really good first syllable for these, we might have some sort of skewed result, if we only had one representative item of each vowel. So, we picked our swear words in part so that we can try to have at least two vowel examples in the swear word. So, we have shit and piss for "eh", and so on. So, English swear words are not particularly well behaved, from the perspective of trying to get a wide range of vowels. So, we were kind of restricted, we had too many "ihs", so we didn't use "dick" because we had already had too many "ihs" in this set. We also had to use "ass" even though it has no initial consonant because we needed another "ah".

Michael

I came into this thinking with this question about wanting to figure out why we swear, but you've kind of just answered it because what you're doing is you're saying we use these words because they sound good, and that's why we use them, and that's ultimately, why we swear because it sounds good when we say it. It makes us feel good, and saying those words together is pleasing. You know, I can remember the first time that I ever swore, and this is a weird thing to say out loud, but I grew up in a very strict Christian home. So not allowed to swear. I was on my trampoline in my backyard, there were these bullies that would come over and basically take over my trampoline and say, "get out of here, kid. This is our trampoline now."

Anne-Michelle

I'm enraged!

Michael

They were about to come over and they're like, "Hey, get off of our trampoline." I looked at them, and said, "Fuck off." So, what you're saying is that the "uh" and the "oh", even though they're different vowels, but they're similar, and that's why fuck off just feels so good to say. In that moment, I just felt this rush of adrenaline. I was like, "Yeah!" Then of course, I cried, and my mom grounded me because I confessed to her. I said, "I swore I'm sorry, I'm going to hell."



Anne-Michelle

I have a remarkably large number of things to respond to this story with. One of them is that you're right, that the vowels "uh" and "oh" are quite similar. So, we had the hope in our study that similarity would also matter. So, because like I said, lots of the worlds languages don't necessarily say vowels have to be the same, they just have to be similar, often along a dimension. Like is your tongue forward or back in your mouth? Are your lips rounded or not rounded? So, along these dimensions, like that's usually what languages care about the most. So, we set up the vowels that we chose in order to be able to ask whether similarity of vowels was good enough, and in fact, it was not. But that could be a limitation of our study, it was like similar doesn't matter, you got to be the same. Having said that, it's also true that those swear words like fuck and shit, and dick, all of their consonants are very extra consonanty. So, we have a scale of how consonanty you are, that's not the technical term. Basically, how sonorous you are, is a more technical term, and the F's and Ks and D's and P's, all of those sounds, that obstruct the airway considerably when you make them, they particularly lend themselves to swear words, in English anyway. So, we don't have a lot of words that begin with M and end in L. They do not sound particularly swearsy in English. My suspicion is that it's actually not so much about the sounds is that that those are the words that are from the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, they are just old, and maybe old stuff sounds crusty. This is pure speculation on my part, I don't actually know whether that's true or not.

Kaylee

I love the idea that we prefer crusty old swear words. So, you were just talking about origins. One thing that you noted in the paper is that the term shitgibbon is maybe better known in the UK than North America. I hadn't heard about it before chatting with you.

Anne-Michelle

Especially Scottish, I believe is the claim.

Kaylee

Yes! To my roots. It should be in my blood. That's weird that I don't know it. So how do these types of terms differ around the world? Do some cultures tend to use different composites? Do you know if it differs?

Anne-Michelle

I don't, but I will say that there's a large amount of literature in other non-linguistics fields that has to do with questions like why certain cultures choose particular forms or kinds of words to swear. So, this area I don't know much about. So, another thing that we also did in the paper was try to see whether there was any evidence just in the non-swearing vocabulary of English that would support this similarity. We did find that. We tried to look at compound words in general, and whether they tend to have the vowels be the same in the two adjacent syllables. The answer was yes, more often than not. I don't think that it's something that people are consciously aware of normally, but it is something that we've got lurking in our lexicon. So, you could imagine being different across dialects or languages that use particularly more of a certain combination of words that that might get amplified. You might grab on to this one combination, and then that becomes a cool way to do something, and then it kind of takes off.

Kaylee

That's really cool. I also want to know what your favorite version of these terms are. Mine, from reading your paper, is one that I learned, and will take with me to my grave, which is fuckpuffin. It just sounds both harsh and adorable. So, I really love it.



Anne-Michelle

Michael, do you have one?

Michael

I mean fucktrumpet makes me laugh a lot. There's a visual to it, blowing something up someone's ass, that's funny to me.

Anne-Michelle

Yes, so there's two. I really like assbadger. I like that one. I especially like pissbiscuit. The thing about pissbiscuit, and it's actually also true of fuckpuffin is that the vowels match, like I've been saying that's crucial, and that makes them sound better. Then for example, if we mismatched like, pisspuffin, not as good, kind of cute, but not as good. Likewise, fuckbiscuit. Again, not bad, but not as good. One thing that strikes me is that they have this matching vowel thing, but also the consonants, they're not all the same consonants, but a lot of them are made with the lips. So, FA, PA and BA are all labial consonants, you're making some hissing noise, but your lips are involved, then P and B are both where you could stop the air entirely. So, I actually think that those consonants also have a certain ring to them. Somehow, there's a sound symbolism thing going on there. That isn't something that we found in our study, we didn't mean to look for it, but when you look for it, it isn't actually in our data. I don't think those words were overall better, but we weren't necessarily like fully quantifying that. I think that's sort of lurking in there as well.

Kaylee

To think we really had so much to choose from as kids. Instead, we were saying things like, butthead, like that doesn't follow the rules at all. Why were we not embracing better linguistics as children?

Anne-Michelle

I mean, it's learning, it's a lifelong process, you need to fully flower before you're ready to do this. So, the coolest thing about this, from my perspective, is that nobody teaches you this fact. Nobody told the dude tweeting in Scotland in 2018. I mean he didn't coin it in this tweet, it is actually in use, but clearly, it's adults coming up with these. This impulse to make the vowels match. That urge, whatever it is, is unconscious. It's not something anybody teaches you, it's something that either you bring to the task of speaking yourself, or you figure it out in some low-key way from your experience of English compounds or something else. The thing about linguistics that's so cool is it's the knowledge that you have that you didn't know you knew, and this is definitely one of those. I didn't know I knew that languages want their vowels to match in any particular way, but apparently, it's revealing itself here.

Michael

So, you had mentioned that we tend to gravitate towards a lot of these old words from Old English. In science fiction, they try to reinvent how people speak. I'm thinking of shows like Battlestar Galactica, that use "frak" as their main swear, or in The Good Place, because it was this heaven place, you couldn't swear. So, they used novel ways to replace those swear words. Do you think that with your study, have you basically laid the groundwork that in the future, they will follow the same pattern?

Anne-Michelle

Yeah, it's a good question, which again, I know nothing about. The thing that strikes me is, it's so often the case in linguistics that what happens is, you notice one thing, an interesting



quirk. What's that word about? Then you dig, and you see there's a whole system down there, like an iceberg that you didn't know was down there. What I think that also means is that usually linguists are terrible, well I'm terrible, at predicting. I think it's more that because we just don't know enough. You see the system and you're like "Oh, that'll happen.", then you run in that direction, and realize it's totally wrong. The crucial thing is that the people who study language change and language contact are maybe the only linguists who have any good insight on how things develop. There are obviously these fairly well established aspects about Historical Linguistics about how meanings tend to come together and come apart, how sound changes tend to converge and diverge, and so on. Having said that, I think we know so little about how swearing works. There's this term expressive meaning, which I feel like I would probably be remiss if I don't use here. So, the thing about expressive meaning is it's the part of meaning that swearing does, but lots of other things do it too. Where something added to the meaning of a sentence goes on top, which doesn't change whether the sentence is true or false. So, if you tell someone "Close the door" or "close the fucking door", it was true that I closed the door, but it's not true that I closed the fucking door, there's no meaning difference there. That kind of expressive stuff, this other meaning as opposed to like truth conditional meaning. This expressive meaning stuff, I know so little about it. I feel like linguists are just going to be like, "Oh, this is how they swear that's great" in the future, and then they'll do the same digging that I've done and been like, "oh, look what's down here."

Michael

Well, you know, you know who else wants to get in on this conversation, Kaylee?

Kaylee

The nerd herd?

Michael

They're actually called the turd herd.

Kaylee

Did you prep that? I love that.

Michael

Alright, if you want to get in on the turd herd questions, we post them on our social media @NerdNiteYVR on Twitter and Instagram. Our first one comes from Britleaf who asks, "Is it true that more swearing means more intelligent?" Hopefully you'll say yes.

Anne-Michelle

Yeah. I'm just going to say yes, I have zero information. I was really perfectly comfortable putting my expert seal of "Yes", with absolutely no knowledge to back me up or whatsoever.

Kaylee

Fantastic. My mother will be pleased. We also have a question from Armin, "why are English swear words so sexual?"

Anne-Michelle

Yes. So, this is a question which again, I don't know anything about, as I told you, it's my side hustle. If you try to think through the sorts of things that languages, and maybe we should say cultures, there are lots of different English's and lots of English's use different swear



words. So, the more popular swear words in North America, for example, would be really different than swear words that are used in Indian English, which is a robust English of its own. So having said that, English has the two main focuses, we have scatological stuff, various stuff that comes out of our bodies, and then we have the sexually associated stuff, and then you can kind of mix and match those. Then I would say there's other kinds of things that languages do, where they pick other religious stuff. So famously, Canadian French has all of these swear words that have to do with the components of the Catholic mass, the host, and the chalice are the terms that traditionally were particularly offensive to use as swears. Then there's also family associated taboos. So maybe that might be a sub topic of the sexual ones about whether or not it involves your mother and so on. Then there's also animals and problematic animals. So sometimes, it's cows, or camels, or monkeys, or donkeys, or maybe pigs. As for why we've chosen these I do not know.

Michael

Oh, man, this is this is the best conversation. I love what's going on here. Do you want to nerd out some more with us Anne-Michelle?

Anne-Michelle

That seems appropriate, yes.

Michael

All right, if you want to get it on the nerd outs, we post them on our social media, you can let us know what you're nerding out about. Anne-Michelle, what have you been nerding out about recently?

Anne-Michelle

So, I'm perennially nerding out on a running app called [Zombies, Run](#). It's an app that you listen to, as you run it has tracking GPS, so you can track that you are moving. So, it's set up like you're in the zombie apocalypse, the beginning season starts maybe a month or so after there has been a plague that has occurred. You're a runner for a small settlement they've fortified themselves against the zombies, but of course they need supplies. So, you go out and run and you get these audio transmissions as you're running. You can tell it that you're going to run this distance, and then it says every sixth of the way along the distance that you run, it cuts into your headphones, you can play music, and then it'll cut in overtop your music and give you some information. There'll be a side project and then over time, you get to know the characters like your operator, the person who is sending you on your runs, and then various other characters emerge. It is a very large world, there are numbers of characters that come back and then seasons later someone reappears, and there's a hole so you eventually start getting embroiled in the story of figuring out how the zombie apocalypse occurred. Then you're involved in trying to fix things and get supplies, it's a very large world. So now I'm very invested in the lives of the characters on Zombies, Run, and they die. Right? Like you lose people. So, it's heartbreaking. (Laughs) There's all manner of other things going on, you can turn on the zombie chases mode.

Kaylee

Nope. (Laughs)

Anne-Michelle

Where then every once in a while, you get chased, and then you have to run faster to evade them. Over the seasons, the audio gets better. So initially, it's just like (Grunts), but then by



Season 6, it's in stereo, they're coming from different directions. Yeah, it's a whole thing. I love it.

Kaylee

I have two questions. First, can you set a zombie training program? Like I want to learn how to run 10k from zombies.

Anne-Michelle

Oh, yes. Absolutely. There are training modes. There are ones where you can do speed drills. It's a happening app. You can play it for free, and then you can only get one mission a week, but if you pay, then you can get them all unlocked.

Kaylee

Second question. Let's say you're super into running and then you do the classic where you just stop running for a while. Do you then log in and it's like, well, everyone's dead.

Anne-Michelle

It's your fault. (Laughs) Your failure to keep up with your fitness has resulted in the death of all of your loved ones. No, it knows no time. It does not do that.

Kaylee

Okay, great. That encourages me to try it. I don't want to kill everybody, which I might. What about you, Michael, you running? Do you run from zombies?

Michael

I don't run from zombies. I mostly just listen to metal, as we've talked about before.

Kaylee

It's almost the same thing.

Michael

It gets the blood pumping. I ran to a movie theatre recently to see the movie Dune. I honestly have missed the movie watching experience, it used to be a big part of my life. Honestly, it was just magical, epic science fiction, amazing production design, everyone should go see it in the theater if possible. It's really, really good. But what I want to talk about is another epic science fiction story that has been adapted from a classic novel, it's on Apple TV right now, and it's Asimov's Foundation. Now, I was very skeptical going into this because the source material is so old, and it's so sweeping and vast and written by a scientist, not really so much an author, Isaac Asimov. He wrote very one-dimensional characters, but a very interesting premise for a story, which is set far in the future where worlds are intergalactic. There's a mathematician who discovers that with enough data points, anything in the future could be predicted. In this show's case, he can predict the fall of empires and mass shifts in societies. It's a show that spans 1000s of years, which is ridiculous, but they somehow are able to do it very cleverly with characters. After a few world-building episodes, it really hits its stride. They gender flipped characters from the source material, and they make the world's full of different race groups that were also never part of the original material and are way more interesting. I remember skimming the books when I was a kid. But these are way better than the books. Like in Star Wars, you go in the galaxy, and it's all filled with white dudes, that's ridiculous. So, Foundation, and other good science fiction, can really imagine futures that have these conversations about race and politics, this show really does have many underlying predictions of the future, global



warming, and we can have this conversation and set it in the future. I think that it can be valuable to distance ourselves from it. So, everyone go check out Foundation, I think it's really great.

Kaylee

I was going to ask, in this one of these future worlds, do they have a congress of a whole bunch of people deciding on their commitments to mitigate some of the harms of climate change like we have in our current world?

Michael

Well, in Foundation, as you'll find out, there's basically the Emperor, and the Emperor figures out that they can rule forever by cloning themselves. There are always three versions of the Emperor. An old version, a present version, and a young version of the same person. Then the old person dies off, and then a new one is born, and it just keeps getting recycled for 1000s and 1000s of years. So, this one person has this continuity that is supposed to hold the empire together. But of course, empires are destined to fall and Harry Selden, the main character, predicts exactly when it is going to.

Anne-Michelle

I feel like that's an accurate characterization of current politics. That's how that works.

Michael

Kaylee, what are you nerding out about?

Kaylee

Well, friends, I went on an adventure. I have lived in Vancouver for almost a decade, and I finally visited Stevenston, which is not far from here. I heard it's lovely and it was lovely.

Anne-Michelle

Did you go to the bakery? Did you get the Romanian bread?

Kaylee

No. Oh, wait, the one with the woodfire oven? Yeah, I stood outside, and I looked inside through the rain and looked at the \$50 bag of bread. Did I want it? Yes, I did. I didn't get the bread, but I did visit the Cannery. So, the Cannery is a historic site from 1894, and it was set up by the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society, which honors the importance of Canada's West Coast fishing history, and shares stories about fishing history and fishing communities. There was a lot to learn about the history of the site, and there were some great plastic fish fillets as far as the eye could see. I thoroughly enjoyed that. What I actually want to talk about was an exhibit that they had on called The Haunted Sea. Now we went right after Halloween, and when we arrived, they said, "Oh, we've got this exhibit up. It's still up. It's covering some other stuff. Do you want to see it?" And we said, well, yes, obviously. So, they let us see The Haunted Sea, and I was imagining some scary anglerfish lurking around, haunting whale song, or some glowing jellies. What was on display was a whole lot scarier than that. The exhibit was essentially a display of the impacts of plastic pollution on the ocean. See this cute picture of a whale? Did you know its stomach is filled with plastic including flip-flops?

Michael

Ugh.



Kaylee

See this net over here? That's an otter that's caught in the net.

Anne-Michelle

Oh my god.

Kaylee

The display that caught my eye the most was this room filled with these beautiful iridescent jellyfish. Now I love jellyfish. I have a tattoo of one. I'm very into them. So, I went into this room. I thought, oh, this is beautiful. I took a picture of my friend. Then I saw this sign that said "Do these plastic bags look like jellyfish? Turtles think so too!" Oh, my gosh! So well played Haunted Sea, well played. Anyway, the display really stuck with me. It's not because it's not something I don't already think about. I am definitely somebody who has full-blown climate pollution anxiety, but it's rare that I actually get an opportunity to engage with an artistic take of it and really spend some time thinking about the impacts that we have on the planet. At the end of the exhibit, there was a little board that asked us what we were going to do to help plastic pollution and both my friend, and I put our little magnets under the section that said we were going to tell somebody about The Haunted Sea, and now I have done that.

Anne-Michelle

Me and the turtles are wrong in a bad way.

Kaylee

I know! Kinship with the turtles but it's not going to end well for us.

Michael

Well Anne-Michelle, thank you so much for joining us here on Nerdin' About. If people want to go and maybe read this paper about shitgibbons, is there a place that people can go and perhaps learn more about your work as a linguist, at the UBC Child Phonology Lab?

Anne-Michelle

I think you should check out the UBC Linguistics webpage and from there you can find all manner of different links both to my own lab website, my own personal website. That's probably the easiest way to find this work, and all the other work. If you look for a Tessier and Becker paper from 2018. I don't actually know what happens when you Google my name and shitgibbons, but it's probably this paper.

Kaylee

Definitely don't go to images, I guess. Thank you so much for really broadening our language, the terms that we use, we really appreciate you for that. Thank you everybody for listening. If you want to hear more from us, you can follow us on our socials @NerdniteYVR on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. This episode was hosted by us, edited by me, and mixed by Elise Lane. We'll be back in a few weeks, but until we meet again, the next time you swear just embrace the fact that you're doing some linguistic mathematics.

Transcribed in part by Otter.ai