

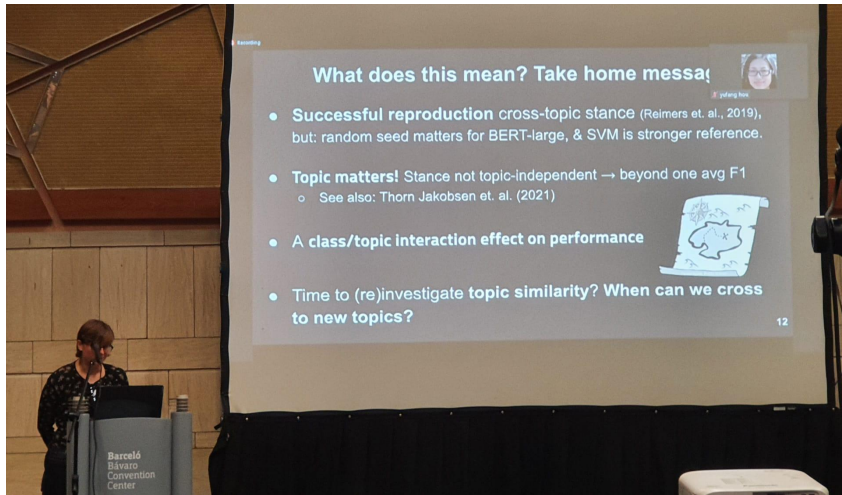
The Road to my PhD

Full of tips & tricks?

Myrthe Reuver

A large, dark blue, diagonal shape that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right corner, covering the lower half of the slide.

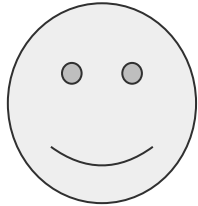
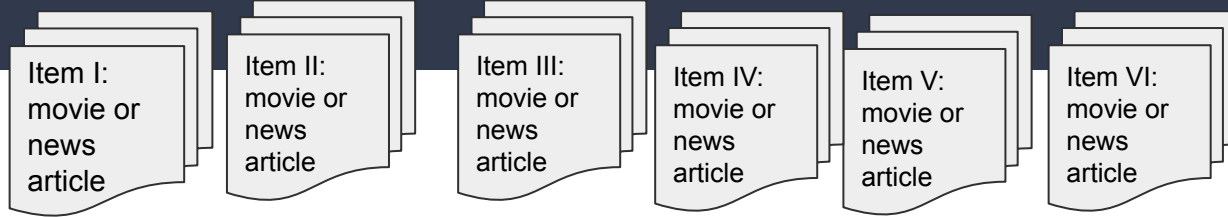
Myrthe Reuver is..



PhD Candidate on News Recommendation (2020-2024) @ VU Computational Linguistics & Text Mining Lab, Faculty of Humanities

→ Supervisors: prof. dr. Antske
Fokkens (CLTL, VU) and dr. Suzan
Verberne (LIACS, Leiden University)

What is a (news) recommender system?



		?			



CartridgeSave Images, Attribution 2.0 Generic
(CC BY 2.0)

Usually: click-accuracy based (user interest), showing users **more of the same**

Can lead to filter bubbles → problematic for democracy.

News is **not like other recommendation domains**, like entertainment or e-commerce, where only optimizing for clicks and interest might work

Aim of my project: Designing diverse news algorithms to help democracy



Key idea: **interdisciplinarity**:

- **Computational Linguistics** → Myrthe Reuver (VU), Antske Fokkens (VU), Suzan Verberne (Leiden University).
- **Philosophy** → Marijn Sax (UvA) , Natali Helberger (UvA).
- **(Political) communication science** → Nicolas Mattis (VU), Wouter van Atteveldt (VU), Judith Moeller (UvA).
- **Recommender Systems** → Sanne Vrijenhoek (UvA), Nava Tintarev (Maastricht).

What do I *do* every day or week?

- **Weekly meetings:** e.g. cool dataset project
- **Monthly meetings:** e.g. Text Mining and Retrieval (TMR) Leiden
- **Bi-weekly:** Paper reading/discussion group

- **Reading** interesting papers, and making notes on them:
- **Brainstorming & thinking**
- **Preparing courses:** my own or ones I'm teaching.
- **Writing**, planning experiments, doing experiments



I really like my PhD!

- **Participating in Academic Discourse & Big Debates!**

Ethics in language technology, do computer models understand language like humans?

- **Being paid for thinking, reading, and watching interesting things.**
- **Being allowed to follow my own interests and ideas (within the project)**

However, these things can also be hard..

- Participating in Academic Discourse & Big Debates!
> **imposter syndrome, writer's block.**
- Being paid for thinking, reading, and watching.
> **Sometimes, no clear goal or planning; getting "lost"**
- Being allowed to follow my own interests and ideas
> **Scary! A lot of responsibility for my *own* PhD.**

How did I get here?



My “Road” (following crumbs of interest)

High school → Journalism School (broad interest, reading, writing)

Journalism School → BA English @ Radboud (friends!)

BA English → Honours → Summerschool Text Mining (🥰) →
ReMa Linguistics

ReMa Linguistics → **MSc CogSci & AI @ Tilburg** (Thesis projects @
IT company)

PhD!

1. Examples matter

Find people you like, and who would want to be like

- Professors, fellow students..
- Look up websites, CVs: what did they do (studies, internships, summerschools, papers)? Why?
- What do you like about them?
- Talk to them!

I had several of these people during my studies: a **professor** I was TA for who was very societally and scientifically responsible but also always curious: a **PhD** in my lab who was VERY smart but also incredibly focussed on community building, and a **famous professor** whose papers I really liked.

2. What do you find important? Know yourself & your story.

- Broad topics, directions, or themes that interest you (for me: **societally responsible** language technology!)
- “Testing out” during ReMA:
 - > Thesis at a company on clinical language data (*not for me*)
 - > Research assistant and internships with different supervisors (*some supervision styles are not for me*)
 - > Is a PhD at all what I like or want to do? (internship, thesis, etc.)

3. Getting Practical

- Finding a PhD position is a little bit part of the “**Hidden Curriculum**”

How I did it?

- **E-mail newsletters** (in my field: corpora list);
- www.academictransfer.com
- **Ask professors** I like to forward me interesting vacancies;
- **Academic Twitter** is large in my field: I also tweeted I was looking for a PhD in my broad interest area.
- **Made a website**, updated it with my CV & research interests

The PhD I got was sent to me **3 times!**

4. YOU are also assessing THEM

YOU should want to work with THEM, and supervision style is important - **maybe even more important than topic interest.**

- Ask about the lab and advisors to your master thesis supervisor, or another academic you trust. Known for certain work? Or a certain supervision style? Bad or good experiences working with them?
- During interviews or email conversations, see whether you “vibe” with them. Ask them **explicitly about supervision style**. How often will you see them? How long do current PhD students take? What is the group atmosphere?

5. Imposter syndrome

I did A LOT (Honours, extra master, etc.) because I was interested, but also because I wanted to Be Prepared & was scared to not know enough.

However, I realized around the end of my ReMa/MSc that:

- i) I knew **a lot** even from just my ReMA, and **basic reading, writing & thinking on arguments were more important** than specific knowledge.
- ii) **genuine interest and perseverance** were more important than “knowing more”, or grades. *I even had a 6 for “Advanced Programming”!*

6. The Culture of Academia

- **Avoid people that make you uncomfortable**, even if they seem important or interesting (there are many other nice, supportive people instead);
- Build your own community, and find supportive peers;
- Strive for community & support, not competition (I wanted a student journal: there was none, so I set one up).

Take Aways

- **Try to to know yourself!** Think about whether a PhD is for you, what topic(s) and what research & supervision style would make you happy.
- **Find mentors and examples.**
- **Do not be afraid to say no** if a position does not fit, or if people seem unsupportive (doing a non-fitting PhD is worse than none!)
- Focus on **interest, support & community** rather than grades, competition and “being better”

Thank you!

Questions?



[myrthe.reuver\[at\]vu.nl](mailto:myrthe.reuver@vu.nl)



[@myrthereuver](https://twitter.com/myrthereuver)