Example research context reconstruction of a *Master's Thesis* (disciplinary embedding)

In this paragraph you will find a description of how I tried to reconstruct the research I did for my Master's thesis. The steps for disciplinary embedding are:

1 write down the topic;
2 describe your academic field and specialisation;
3 reconstruct the subsets that lie between the topic and the academic field.

1 Write down the topic

The research subject was: problems in the written presentation of the minorities' policy at the municipality of The Hague.

2 Describe your academic field and specialisation

I studied:

1 Dutch Language and Literature

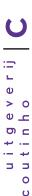With a specialisation in

2 communication (Dutch)

The main subject of these studies was:

3 verbal communication (Dutch)

3 Reconstruct the subsets that lie between the topic and the academic field

What themes in my studies were relevant to my research subject? In 1984 two domains were studied in communication studies. Because these domains were part of the department of *Dutch Language and Literature*, it is somewhat difficult to translate their terms into English, but let us give it a try. The first theme was: (1) *verbal communication on public affairs to the public* (in Dutch: 'Voorlichting'). The other one was: (2) *verbal communication on the policy that a for-profit or not-for-profit organisation is about to conceive, implement and/or evaluate* (in Dutch: 'Beleidscommunicatie'). In my case, this distinction was rather complicated: I was supposed to study the communication **to** the general public **about** the policy. This reasoning can be reproduced in the next three choices (new choices are **bold**):

4 verbal communication **of policies** (Dutch)
5 **public** verbal communication of policies (Dutch)
6 verbal **presentation** of policies (Dutch)

This last step implies that my perspective on the subject 'presentation' is that presentation is a form of public communication and has thus been embedded within the disciplinary theme of public communication. Theories about public communication can therefore be used in this study.

What choices are implied, originating from *verbal presentation of policies* (6) and leading to the subject as described in step 1? In the communication discipline a logical start is the choice of either oral or written communication. Looking at the subject (step 1), it is obvious that a decision has been made:

   7   **written** presentation of policies (Dutch)

Stating this decision explicitly reminds me of the fact that oral ways of presenting the policy will **not** be taken into account in this study. Besides, the word 'verbal' can be deleted now, because that term is implied by the word 'written'

The subject in step 1 also states *the municipality of The Hague*. Is this some kind of accidental choice? In fact it is, because that municipality asked me to do the research. Living in an academic discourse community, however, forced me to go beyond this particular case, so I will have to point out 'what kind of thing' it is. I remember a distinction being made in the field of public affairs: *governmental* versus *non-governmental*. This led to the following reconstruction:

   8   written presentation of **governmental** policies (Dutch)
   9   written presentation of **local** governmental policies (Dutch)
   10   written presentation of **municipal** policies (Dutch)

What to do about *The Hague*: 'what kind of municipality' is this? Of course, one can see The Hague as a city along the coast, or as a city housing the central government of the country, or as …, but I will have to decide which features are relevant to this particular study. So we have to go to the *problems* mentioned in the first subject. What features are relevant in the perspective of those problems? What are those problems? In this case, the problem in the presentation was that the Dutch majority of citizens of The Hague reacted negatively to every news item about something the municipality did or planned to do involving the minority of citizens coming from foreign countries such as Turkey or Morocco. The indigenous inhabitants thought that too much money was being spent on these minority groups, whereas the municipal council considered these projects necessary in order to give those groups opportunities to achieve social status equal to the other citizens. This reflection led to the following choices:

   11   **problems** with written presentation of municipal policies (Dutch)
   12   problems with written presentation of **unpopular** municipal policies (Dutch)
   13   problems with written presentation of the unpopular municipal '**minorities** policy' (Dutch)

The use of the word 'unpopular' indicates once again the public communication perspective on the subject. Whereas scientists with other backgrounds could describe a policy subject in terms of for example the way in which the policy is developed, from a public communication point of view this is less relevant.

At this point we can reconstruct the 'choice' of The Hague via:

14 problems with written presentation of the unpopular 'minorities policy' of a municipality **containing at least x inhabitants** (Dutch);

15 problems with written presentation of the unpopular 'minorities policy' of a municipality containing at least x inhabitants **of which at least y % is of foreign origin** (Dutch);

16 problems with written presentation of the unpopular 'minorities policy' of the municipality **of The Hague** (Dutch).