

# On Symmetry breaking and Simplex Threats

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(based on joint work with Moshe E. Bar-lev and Tue Trinh)

A prominent solution to the ‘symmetry problem’ allows implicatures to be computed from simple but not from complex alternatives (‘COMPLEXITY’; Katzir 2007). Recently Schwarz and Wagner (2024) have proposed a different mechanism for symmetry breaking (‘BLOCKING’), arguing that it can, but COMPLEXITY cannot, account for cases of so-called ‘simplex threats’ in which the simple alternative is available but the expected implicature is unattested. This note provides a defense of COMPLEXITY. We show that it explains simplex threats once coupled with constraints on questions (‘Partition by Exhaustification’; Fox 2019, 2020) and on assertability of sentences with contextually equivalent alternatives (‘Fatal Competition’; Magri 2009, Bar-Lev and Fox 2023). We furthermore point out (following Schmitt and Haslinger 2025) that BLOCKING makes a wrong prediction for some cases.

## References

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