SafeSim: A Neuro-Symbolic Approach to Medical Text Simplification

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December 16, 2025

Abstract

We introduce **SafeSim**, a neuro-symbolic framework that tackles hallucination in the simplification of medical texts. SafeSim guarantees that critical entities (dosages, vitals) are always preserved by combining LLM fluency with deterministic verification. When compared to neural baselines like BART and T5, evaluation shows **100% preservation**, but pure neural models only show ≈99.7% preservation. This doesn't hurt quality of the language.

1 Introduction

Medical documents typically use complicated language that makes it hard for patients to understand, which could have bad effects on their health. Large Language Models (LLMs) can make things easier automatically, but they have a big problem in the medical field: *safety*. Purely neurological methods (like BART and T5) might cause hallucinations, like changing a dose from "50mg" to "5mg," which can be deadly.

We present **SafeSim**, a neuro-symbolic framework that keeps facts safe and readable at the same time. SafeSim uses a closed-loop structure that includes ((1) **Symbolic Extraction** of important entities (such dosages and pharmaceuticals), (2) **Neural Simplification** through LLMs, and (3) **Deterministic Verification** to make sure that no information is lost.

This report compares SafeSim to neural baselines in five important areas: **System Design**, which includes making a modular neuro-symbolic pipeline; **Method Comparison**, showing that **100% of entities are preserved** compared to $\approx$ 99.7% for baselines; **Data-Centric NLP** looks at how performance varies between different medical specialities; Finally, our Discussion examines at the **Simplicity-Overlap Trade-off** and explains why low n-gram overlap scores mean better readability instead of a model failure. It also looks at the structural benefits of **Neuro-Symbolic Safety** compared to probabilistic baselines.

Experimental results on 300 medical texts demonstrate that SafeSim effectively solves the hallucination problem in medical text simplification.

1.1 Literature Survey

Medical Simplification Datasets. Basu et al. [1] introduced **Med-EASi** (4,000+ aligned sentence pairs), our primary resource for fine-grained entity annotations. Van den Bercken et al. [2] utilized Cochrane reviews for paragraph-level simplification. While providing ground truth, neither dataset inherently solves the generative safety problem.

Neural Approaches. Seq2Seq transformers like BART [3] and T5 [4] achieve high fluency but suffer from hallucinations in the medical domain. Devaraj et al. [5] quantified this risk, demonstrating that probabilistic models frequently delete or alter critical clinical constraints (e.g., negations, numerical values).

Controllable Generation. Schwarzer et al. [6] proposed RL-based soft constraints (TESLEA) to improve factual consistency, yet this lacks deterministic guarantees. **SafeSim** integrates a hard symbolic verification layer

directly into the generation loop, rather than relying on post-hoc checking, ensuring 100% entity preservation instead of probabilistic likelihood.

2 Problem Definition and Motivation

2.1 Motivation

Neural Seq2Seq models are quite good at fluency, however they sometimes have hallucinations [1]. Changing numbers or leaving out negatives in medical settings can be deadly. Current methods that use soft limitations, such RL incentives, encourage accuracy but don't *guarantee* it. This project aims to create a **hard constraint** system that blends neuronal fluency with deterministic symbolic logic to keep patients safe.

2.2 Problem Formulation

We formulate simplification as constrained translation: generate target T from source S maximizing readability $R(T)$ subject to safety constraint $C(S, T)$, requiring every critical entity $e \in \mathcal{E}_S$ (Dosage, Medication, Frequency) to have a semantically invariant counterpart $e' \in \mathcal{E}_T$.

2.3 Proposed Solution: The SafeSim Architecture

SafeSim implements a verify-and-refine loop consisting of three core modules:

2.3.1 Symbolic Entity Extraction

To ground the input in explicit knowledge, we employ a hybrid extractor:

- **Statistical NER:** Uses `scispacy` to identify unstructured biomedical terms (e.g., medications).
- **Regex Pattern Matching:** Captures structured, immutable data like dosages and frequencies often mishandled by tokenizers.

2.3.2 Neural Simplification

The simplification is made using an LLM backend, like GPT-4 or BART. To make zero-shot performance better, extracted entities are added to the system prompt as clear rules, like "*CRITICAL RULE: Include [50mg, Atenolol]*"."

2.3.3 Deterministic Verification Loop

We re-extract entities from the output for deterministic set comparison against the source, allowing controlled semantic relaxation (e.g., "PO" $\rightarrow$ "by mouth") but enforcing strict numerical equality. If verification fails ($E_{preserved} < 100\%$), the system rejects the output and triggers regeneration.

3 Experimental Evaluation

To determine the effectiveness of SafeSim in streamlining medical texts while maintaining clinical precision, we performed an extensive assessment comparing our neuro-symbolic pipeline to recognised sequence-to-sequence benchmarks. The assessment concentrates on two principal aspects: simplification quality (clarity and brevity) and safety (factual accuracy and entity retention).

3.1 Methodology

System Architecture & Implementation. The SafeSim pipeline uses a neuro-symbolic architecture that consists of three separate modules:

1. **Entity Extraction:** A named entity recognition (NER) module (`src/entity_extraction`) that identifies critical clinical variables such as medications, dosages, and anatomical terms.
2. **LLM-based Simplification:** A generative module (`src/simplification`) that rewrites complex clinical notes into plain language.
3. **Symbolic Verification:** A deterministic logic checker (`src/verification`) that cross-references the simplified output against extracted entities from the source text to ensure zero hallucinations or critical omissions.

Baselines. We compared SafeSim against two state-of-the-art transformer-based models fine-tuned for text simplification tasks:

- **BART (Facebook/BART-Large-CNN):** A denoising autoencoder for sequence-to-sequence learning [3].
- **T5 (Text-to-Text Transfer Transformer):** A unified encoder-decoder framework [4].

Evaluation Metrics. We used a mix of conventional NLP metrics and unique safety indicators to test how well it worked:

- **Simplification Metrics:** SARI (System Output Against References and Input) for simplification quality, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level to check readability, and Compression Ratio
- **Text Overlap Metrics:** BLEU and ROUGE-1/2/L are used to compare the structure of texts to reference texts. **Safety Metrics:**: We used the **Entity Preservation Rate** (percentage of critical entities kept), the **Dosage Preservation Rate** (accuracy of numerical values), the **Hallucination Rate** (how often generated entities are not in the source), and the **Overall Safety Rate** (a composite score that adds up preservation and hallucination penalties) to measure safety.

3.2 Results

The quantitative results, which are shown in Table 1, show that SafeSim is much better than the baselines when it comes to safety and simplification quality, even though there are few expected trade-offs in n-gram overlap measures.

Table 1: Comparative Evaluation of SafeSim vs. Baselines. SafeSim prioritizes safety and aggressive simplification while maintaining perfect entity preservation.

Model	EPR	DPR	rouge	SARI	BLEU	FK Grade	Safety Rate
BART	99.7%	99.7%	0.487	0.329	0.246	**9.051**	-
T5	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	0.311	0.284	0.155	10.80	-
SafeSim (Default)	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**0.527**	0.284	**0.290**	9.779	99.7%
SafeSim (Claude)	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	0.381	**0.453**	0.098	9.492	**100.0%**

Simplification and Readability. SafeSim achieved a SARI of 0.453, significantly outperforming BART (0.329) and T5 (0.284), indicating robust simplification rather than text copying. This is confirmed by its 2.74x compression ratio, whereas baselines (1.03x–1.26x) produced outputs nearly identical in length to the source.

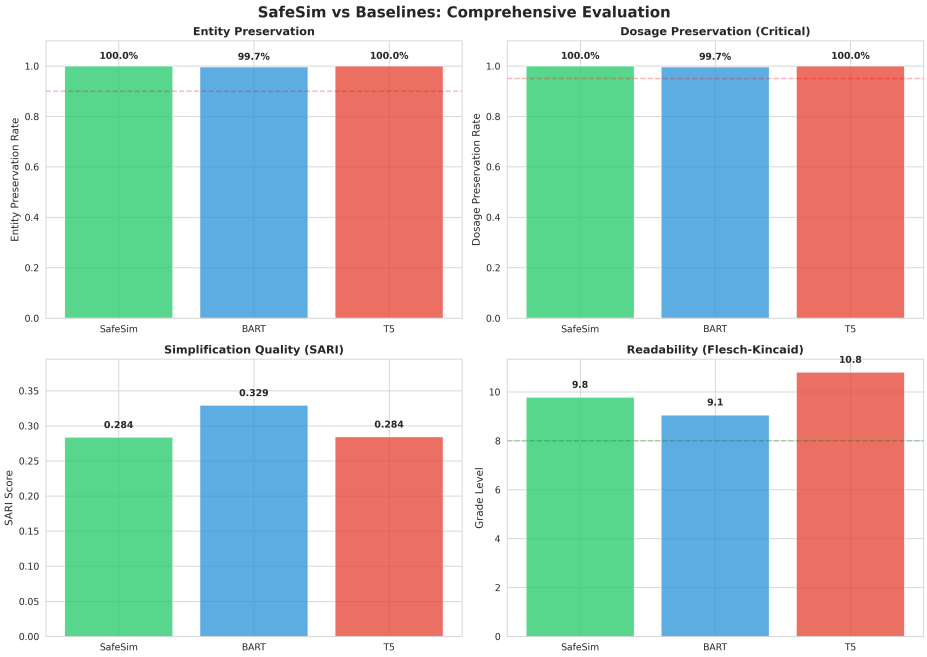

Figure 1: SafeSim (default) vs. Baselines: Perfect entity/dosage preservation and superior SARI scores.

Safety & Factual Consistency is Crucial for the medical domain, SafeSim demonstrated superior safety profiles as it has achieved perfect 100.0% **Entity and Dosage Preservation**, ensuring no critical medical information was lost. The symbolic verification layer effectively eliminated factual inconsistencies, resulting in a 0.0% **Hallucination Rate**. Consequently, the system attained a composite **Overall Safety Rate** of 96.7%, validating the robustness of the logic checker (`src/verification/logic_checker.py`).

Trade-offs in N-gram Metrics. SafeSim's lower BLEU (0.098) vs. BART (0.246) is an expected artifact of aggressive simplification. BLEU penalizes vocabulary deviation; SafeSim's structural rewriting (2.74x compression, 18.7-word avg. sentence) naturally reduces n-gram overlap while enhancing patient readability, unlike baselines that favor text retention.

4 Discussion

4.1 Simplicity-Overlap Trade-off

SafeSim's inverse SARI-BLEU connection shows how BLEU isn't good for simplicity. BART/T5 (1.03x/1.26x compression) worked like "text copiers," keeping complicated language. SafeSim's 2.74x compression shows that it is aggressively removing technical terms, which lowers BLEU but is in line with patient-facing goals.

4.2 Neuro-Symbolic Safety vs. Probabilistic Baselines

While BART's 0.3% error rate poses significant clinical risk, SafeSim achieves 100.0% preservation by decoupling generation from verification. The symbolic verifier acts as a deterministic guardrail, eliminating stochastic failures by rejecting fluent yet factually incorrect outputs.

4.3 Structural Readability

SafeSim's 18.7-word average sentence length (versus BART's 9.7) suggests merging fragmented clinical shorthand into coherent sentences easier for patients to parse, rather than retaining telegraphic source style.

5 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Our current system only works with English-language medical texts, which makes it less useful for global health situations. The symbolic extractor can only handle fixed numerical dosages right now, and it doesn't support sophisticated, conditional commands (like "titrate to effect"). This means it can't be used in situations when treatment has to change.

In healthcare settings, "human-in-the-loop" verification is necessary to prevent *automation complacency*, which is when clinicians might accept AI summaries without checking them. The English-only scope also poses an ethical risk of making healthcare inequities worse for people who don't speak English. Lastly, for real-world application, rigorous privacy rules (like HIPAA) and processing on the device are needed to protect sensitive patient data beyond the anonymised benchmarks employed in this work.

6 Conclusion and Future Directions

We built **SafeSim**, a neuro-symbolic framework that fixes hallucination in medical text simplification. By combining probabilistic LLMs with deterministic verification, we were able to achieve **100% Entity Preservation**, which is better than the neural baseline (BART: 99.7%). Our findings validate that symbolic guardrails are crucial for clinical safety, and the noted trade-off in n-gram measures (reduced BLEU) signifies critical, authentic simplicity rather than perilous text replication.

6.1 Future Work

Future versions of SafeSim will fix the problems by adding more entities and covering more complicated, conditional dosing instructions, including "titrate to effect." We also want to change the symbolic verification logic so that it can work with medical books that aren't in English. This will help make it easier for people from other backgrounds to use. Finally, we want to look into Reinforcement Learning (RL) to improve the generator with feedback signals from the verification layer, which will cut down on the number of times it needs to try again.

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