

① If we know the plaintext and ciphertext, how can we find the key?

To decrypt a Hill-cypher with a  $n \times n$  key requires determining  $n^2$  entries (either of the key matrix or the key inverse matrix).

If we have the mapping between plaintext and ciphertext for  $n$ -letter blocks, we can determine the key entries. The mapping allow us to establish  $n$  systems of linear congruences, each with  $n$  equations involving  $n$  unknowns.

let's suppose we have the message of  $n$  letters and its encryption. Then, we can convert the message to a vector of integers  $(v_1 \dots v_n)$  and also the encrypted message  $(u_1 \dots u_n)$ .

Since ,

$$\begin{pmatrix} v_1 \\ \vdots \\ v_n \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} k_{1,1} & \dots & k_{1,n} \\ \vdots & & \vdots \\ k_{n,1} & \dots & k_{n,n} \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} u_1 \\ \vdots \\ u_n \end{pmatrix}$$

we get  $n$  equations of the form:  $v_i = \sum_{j=1}^n u_j \cdot k_{i,j} \quad \forall i=1, \dots, n$

These are equations of congruences mod 26 that we know how to solve.

② Is this possible if we only know the ciphertext?

Without knowing the plaintext, the only way to determine the key matrix would be brute-force. This means do the product of every possible key matrix inverse and the cipher vector and checking if this produce a plaintext that looks like a valid message.

This doesn't seem possible, since the number of possible key matrices is  $26^{n^2}$ , where  $n$  is the dimension.