

Verifiable & Private Inference

Methods beyond ZK & FHE

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Introduction

- Lead Developer at **Dria**
- We are building a peer-to-peer network of

Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Large Language Models (LLMs) in particular, are revolutionizing the world. Close to %10 of the entire world population is using ChatGPT alone¹.

New models are coming out every week, smashing the existing records on numerous benchmarks, with an ever increasing performance demand².

We are actually progressing faster than we thought we were, as noted by powerhouse's such as OpenAI, Anthropic, and Google DeepMind³.

¹<https://backlinko.com/chatgpt-stats>

²<https://hai.stanford.edu/ai-index/2025-ai-index-report>

³<https://80000hours.org/agi/guide/when-will-agi-arrive/>

Within this talk, we are specifically interested in the **inference** part of the AI/LLM stack. Inference is the process of running a trained model to make predictions or generate outputs based on new input data, as shown in Figure 1.

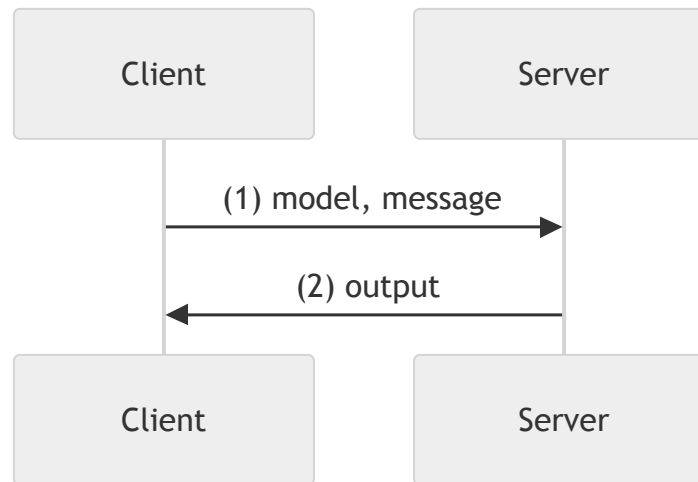


Figure 1: Inference

There are two problems with such an inference:

- Can we make sure that **Server** is really using model and message to generate its output? (Verifiable Inference)
- Can we make sure that **Server** does not see what is written in our message and output? (Privacy-Preserving Inference)

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We would like to focus on **consumer-grade** model providers in particular, as they can:

- Locally serve models on their own hardware, utilizing their idle-compute on open-source models
- Join a permissionless network & earn from their services
- Decentralize the inference market, which is currently dominated by a few big players

ZK & FHE & TEE

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It has three notable properties:

- **Completeness**: If the statement is true, an honest prover can convince any verifier.
- **Soundness**: If the statement is false, no dishonest prover can convince the verifier.
- **Zero-Knowledge**: If the statement is true, the verifier learns nothing beyond it being true.

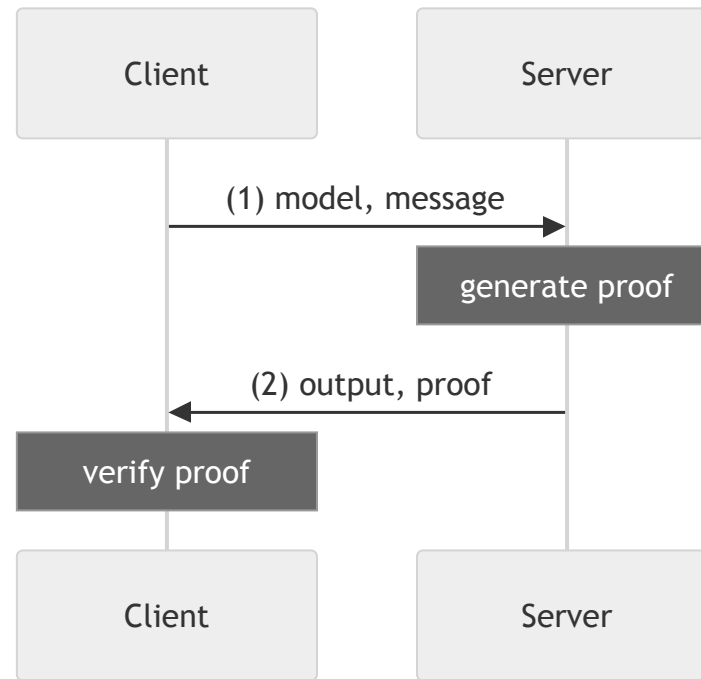


Figure 2: Inference with ZK

Within LLM inference, a ZK-proof tells you that indeed your chosen model was used for inference (Figure 2). It does NOT hide the user prompt though, because the proof **requires** processing the prompt.

Fully Homomorphic Encryption (FHE)

FHE allows computation on encrypted data without decrypting it.

- $\text{Enc}(a) + \text{Enc}(b) = \text{Enc}(a + b)$
- $\text{Enc}(a) * \text{Enc}(b) = \text{Enc}(a * b)$

This allows one to hide the input & output data during inference.

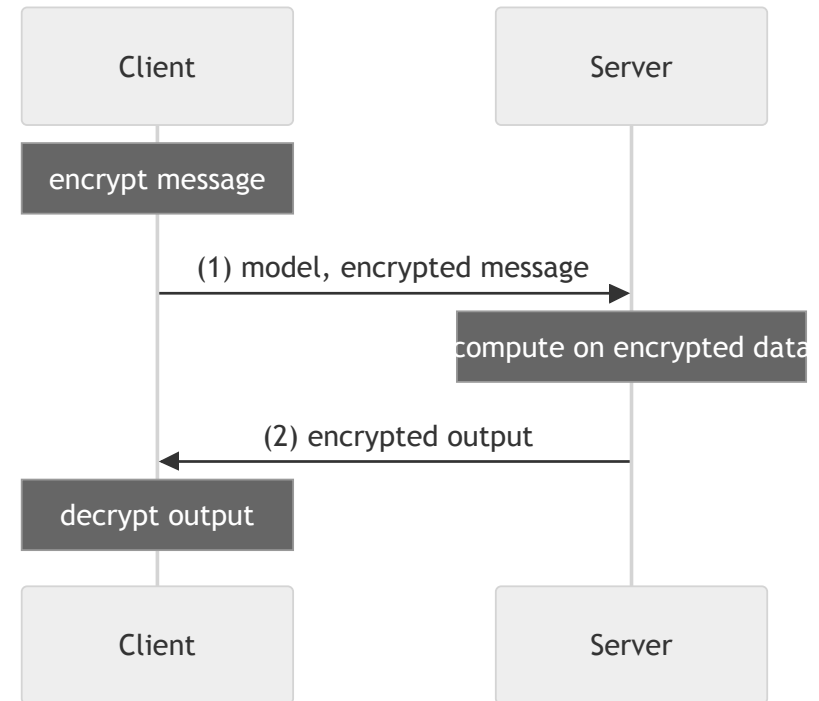


Figure 3: Inference with FHE

TEEs are hardware-based secure enclaves (Intel SGX, ARM TrustZone, AMD SEV). They ensure isolated execution with memory encryption, along with a remote attestation to prove code integrity.

We get both the privacy and verifiability at once here, at the cost of a trusted attestation service and hardware.

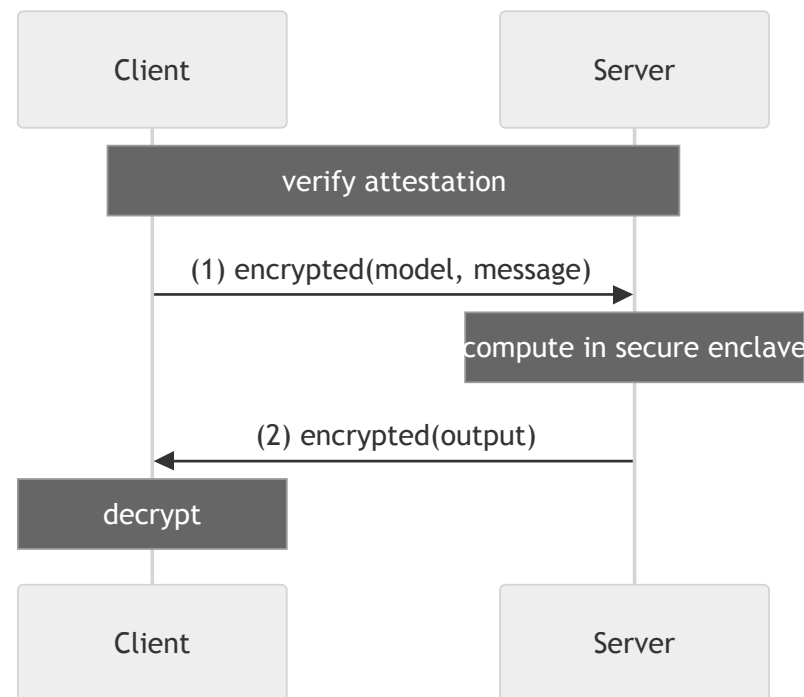


Figure 4: Inference with TEE

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- LLMs make use of floating point arithmetic, bad for the finite field arithmetic in ZK and FHE.
- TEEs require a trusted hardware environment. Furthermore, they operate in rather memory and compute constrained environments; yet still are open to side-channel attacks [3].
- These make it even harder for practical deployment in real-world applications, especially on consumer-grade devices.

Transformers

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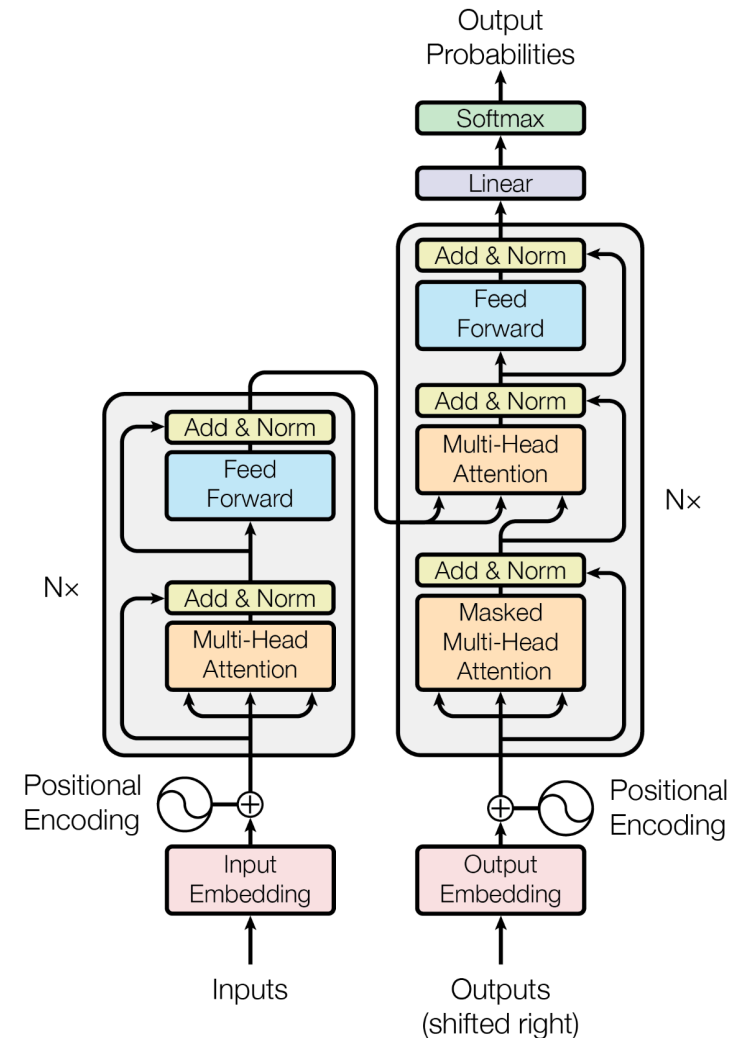
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The dominant architecture today is the Transformer, introduced in “Attention is All You Need” (2017) [4].

- Replaced RNNs with **self-attention** mechanism.
- Parallel processing enables efficient training.

Key Components

- **Self-Attention**: allows tokens to attend to all other tokens in sequence; multiple attention heads capture different relationships.
- **Feed-Forward Networks**: position-wise fully connected layers; provides non-linear transformations.
- **Layer Normalization & Residual Connections**: stabilizes training and enables deeper networks.



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Modern LLMs are decoder-only:

- GPT, LLaMA use decoder-only architecture.
- Simpler design, better scaling properties.
- Trained with causal (left-to-right) attention mask.

We are focused on **decoder-only** models in this talk!

There are two main steps in autoregressive inference:

- **Prefill**: initialize the context with a prompt or previous tokens. While this is compute intensive, it is highly parallelisable!
- **Decoding**: generate the output sequence one token at a time. This step is inherently sequential and cannot be parallelized.

This will be important later on.

Challenge & Verify

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You can send a procedurally generated prompt with a known output, and check if the provider returns the correct result.

- For mathematical reasoning, there are static analysis tools like MathVerify [5].
- For code generation, you can use a sandboxed unit-test to check if the generated code works as expected.
- For text generation, you can use a set of known question-answer pairs; or simply do a string inclusion check.

A simple example:

- Have a list of animals:

```
["cat", "dog", "bird", "snake", "fish"]
```

- Pick 2 animals, and pick 2 numbers, and generate a prompt:

```
"How many legs are there in total for 3 dogs and 2 birds?"
```

- Compare the model's response with the expected output using static analysis.

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- You need different challenges for each model, to avoid false-positives on small models acting like large ones while passing the easy challenges.
- Model can be funny: “How many legs are there among 0 snakes and 0 snakes?”, the model says: “Of course none at all hahah!” instead of “0”.

Veri-Split

**Secure & Practical Offloading
of ML Inference**

Splitting with Noise

- for non-linear parts, they use the device itself
- expensive matrix multiplication is off-loaded

<https://arxiv.org/html/2405.20681v1> says privacy with noise MUST incur loss

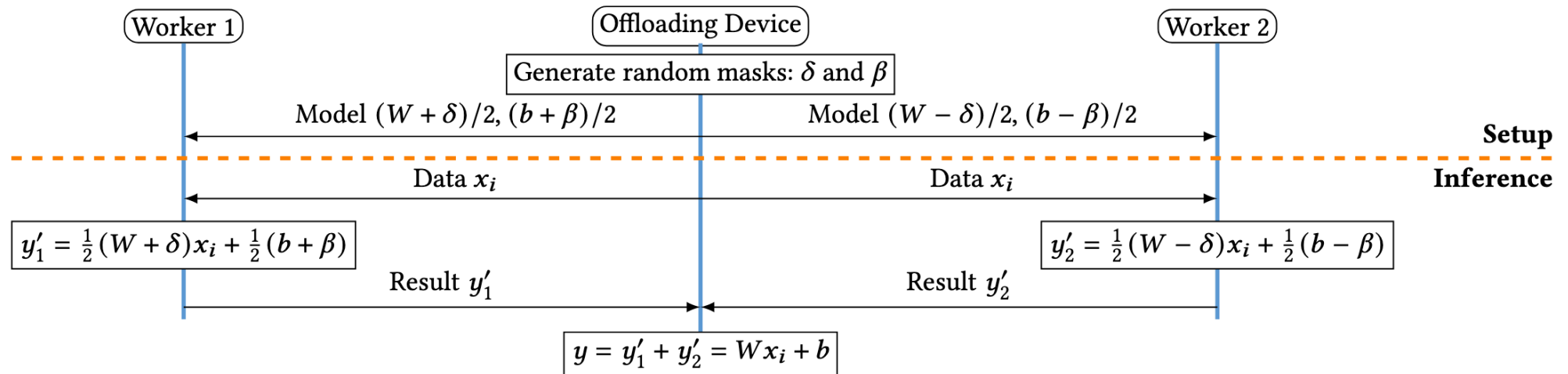


Figure 6: Split with Noise

Veri-Split paper also proposes using a Merkle Tree for committing to intermediate layers, followed by a random interactive protocol to request Merkle Proofs.

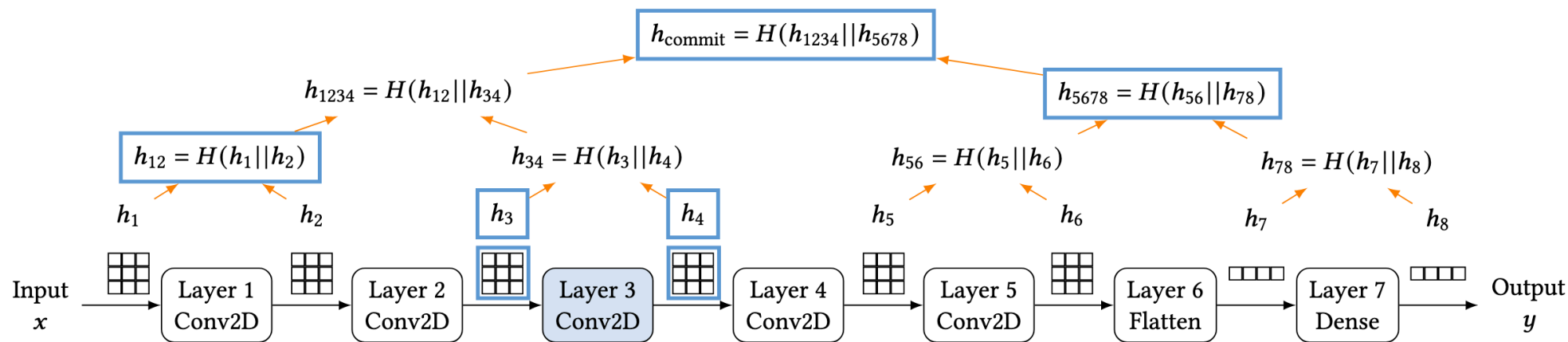


Figure 7: Merkle Tree for Intermediate Layer Commitment

TOPLOC

Locality Sensitive Hashing

TOPLOC [6] is a novel method of *committing* to an LLM-inference.

During inference, the prover creates a commitment to the **last hidden state** every few tokens.

It is vulnerable against **speculative decoding** [7]: using a smaller & more efficient model for *decoding* phase (to make guesses), and then using the actual model for the *prefill* over the generated tokens (to make corrections).

TOPLOC has a version 2 as well, which brings support for pipeline parallelism!

STIP

**Secure Transformer Inference
Protocol**

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- Row-permutations simply change the order of the input tokens, which in turn changes the order of the output tokens in a predictable way.
- Linear operations are not affected by row-permutations, they simply “carry” the permutation to their results.
- Non-linear operations are *element-wise*, so they are also not affected by row-permutations.

Semi-Symmetrical Permutations

The key insight of STIP is to permute matrices **semi-symmetrically**, in such a way that the operations cancel each other out!

Suppose $y = xA$. We generate 2 permutations: π, π_c and permute the input and the matrix as follows:

- $x' = x\pi$
- $A' = \pi^T A \pi_c$
- $y' = x' A' = x(\pi\pi^T) A \pi_c = x A \pi_c$

The receiver of y' can re-permute to obtain $y = (x' A') \pi_c^T$

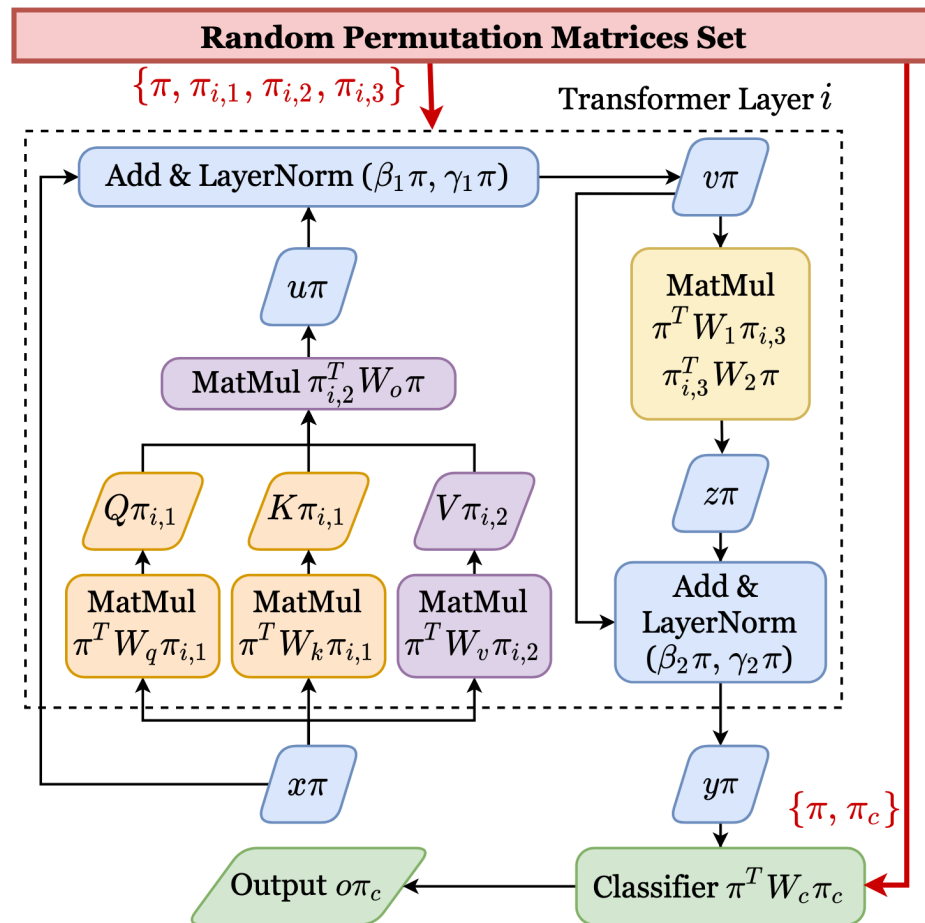


Figure 8: STIP Permutations

Semi-Symmetrical Permutations

STIP generates permutations π, π_c for input and output, and $\pi_{i,1}, \pi_{i,2}, \pi_{i,3}$ for each layer i .

Then, they permute all layers of the LLM with different semi-symmetrical permutations. The user receives π, π_c and the model server receives permuted weights.

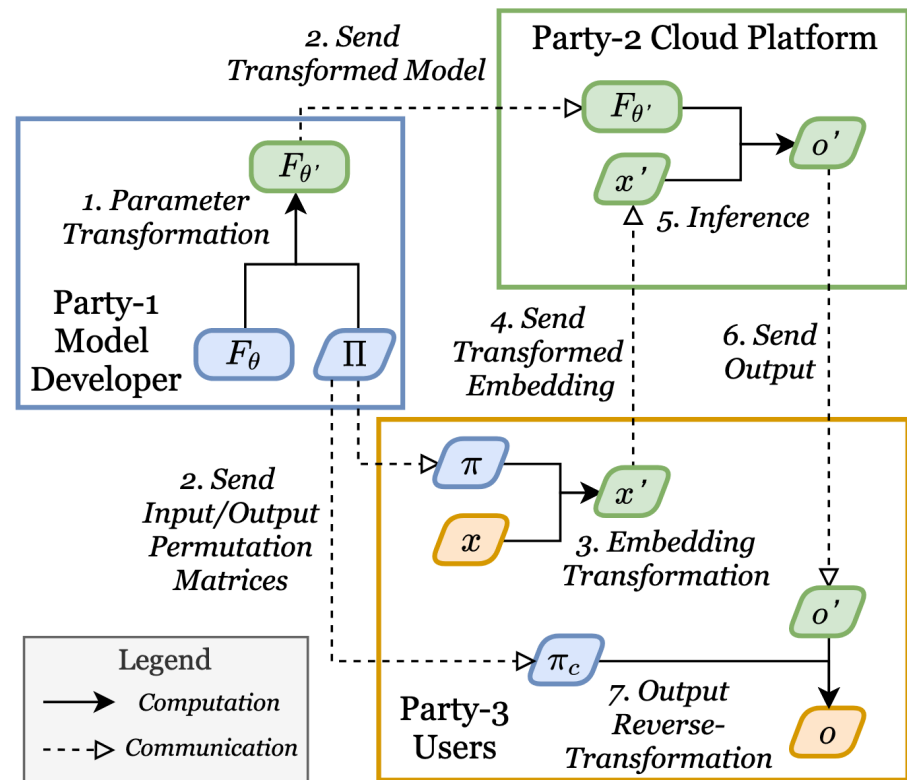


Figure 9: STIP Overview

There are some attacks, such as user-become-server cases; but they can be solved with efficient re-permutations¹ and one-more-than-once permutations per model for multiple users and servers.

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Sadly, a recent paper [10] has shown how to break the privacy guarantees of STIP, by pointing out an error in their statistical approach. They are able to break the permutation to recover the tokens as if they were unpermuted.

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Nevertheless, they show that with addition of **noise** to the equation, one can still achieve privacy at the cost of accuracy using these permutations.

It's important to note that another paper [11] shows that privacy-preserving LLM inference **MUST** come with some kind of accuracy loss, i.e. “No Free Lunch”.

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Future

What Next?

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Even further, these methods are pipeline-parallelism safe, so multiple devices can work together to create these proofs for their “portions” of the whole LLM.

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Q & A

slides — github.com/erhant/cryptist-2025-inference

reach out — x.com/0xerhant