On the existence of a \((2, 3)\)-spread in \(V(7, 2)\)

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Abstract

An \((s, t)\)-spread in a finite vector space \(V = V(n, q)\) is a collection \(\mathcal{F}\) of \(t\)-dimensional subspaces of \(V\) with the property that every \(s\)-dimensional subspace of \(V\) is contained in exactly one member of \(\mathcal{F}\). It is remarkable that no \((s, t)\)-spreads has been found yet, except in the case \(s = 1\).

In this note, the concept \(\alpha\)-point to a \((2, 3)\)-spread \(F\) in \(V = V(7, 2)\) is introduced. A classical result of Thomas, applied to the vector space \(V\), states that all points of \(V\) cannot be \(\alpha\)-points to a given \((2, 3)\)-spread \(F\) in \(V\). In this note, we strengthened this result by proving that every 6-dimensional subspace of \(V\) must contain at least one point that is not an \(\alpha\)-point to a given \((2, 3)\)-spread of \(V\).

1 Introduction

An \((s, t)\)-spread in the finite vector space \(V = V(n, q)\) over GF\((q)\) is a collection \(\mathcal{F}\) of \(t\)-dimensional subspaces of \(V\) with the property that every \(s\)-dimensional subspace of \(V\) is contained in exactly one member of \(\mathcal{F}\). So far no \((s, t)\)-spread, with \(s > 1\), has been found, and it was conjectured by Metsch that none exists, see \cite{1} for a survey.

If there exists an \((s, t)\)-spread \(F\) in \(V\) then for any point \(P\) in \(V\), the members of \(\mathcal{F}\) that contain \(P\) induce an \((s − 1, t − 1)\)-spread \(\mathcal{F}_P\) in the quotient space \(V/P\). A \((1, t)\)-spread, or for short spread, \(S\) of \(V\) is called geometric if for any three members \(S_1, S_2\) and \(S_3\) of \(S\) such that \(S_3 \cap (S_1 \cup S_2) \neq \{0\}\), we have \(S_3 \subseteq (S_1 \cup S_2)\).

Thomas \cite{2} proved the following theorem.

\textbf{Theorem 1} Given a \((2, t)\)-spread \(\mathcal{F}\) of \(V = V(n, q)\), there exists a point \(P\) in \(V\) such that the derived \((1, t − 1)\)-spread \(\mathcal{F}_P\) is not geometric.

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It must be remarked that geometric spreads are the spreads that are most natural and “easiest” to construct, although most of the spreads are not geometric.

The existence of $(2,3)$-spreads in $V(7,2)$ is the “first” open case for this conjecture. In this note, we give a property of $(2,3)$-spreads in $V(7,2)$, which, in this particular case, yields the result of Thomas as a corollary.

Assume that $\mathcal{F}$ is a $(2,3)$-spread in $V = V(7,2)$. As every spread in a 6-dimensional subspace $U$ of $V$ is of size 21, we get that every 1-dimensional subspace $P$, or point, of $V$ is contained in 21 members of $\mathcal{F}$. As each of these 21 members of $\mathcal{F}$ contains 7 points, of which three belongs to $U$, it follows that $U$ contains 45 members of $\mathcal{F}$. Similarly, we may derive that every point $P$ in $U$ is contained in exactly 5 of these 45 members of $\mathcal{F}$ and that every 5-dimensional subspace $T$ of $U$ contains exactly five members of $\mathcal{F}$.

We will say that a point $P$ is an $\alpha$-point to $\mathcal{F}$ if every 5-dimensional subspace $T$ of $V$ that contains two of the members of $\mathcal{F}$ that meet at $P$, has the property that all its five members from $\mathcal{F}$ will meet at the point $P$. From the definition of a geometric spread, it follows that in the case of $(2,3)$-spreads in $V = V(7,2)$, Theorem [1] of Thomas states that at least one point of $V$ is not an $\alpha$-point to $\mathcal{F}$.

We will show the following Theorem.

**Theorem 2** Assume that $\mathcal{F}$ is a $(2,3)$-spread in $V = V(7,2)$. Every 6-dimensional subspace of $V$ contains at least one point which is not an $\alpha$-point to $\mathcal{F}$.

**2 Proof of Theorem**

Assume that $\mathcal{F}$ is a $(2,3)$-spread in $V = V(7,2)$. Let $U$ be any 6-dimensional subspace of $V$. Assume that all points in $U$ are $\alpha$-points to $\mathcal{F}$. Then every 5-dimensional subspace $T$ of $U$ will contain a point $P$ where all its five members from $\mathcal{F}$ meet. This point $P$ will be called the $\alpha$-point of $T$. Moreover, each point $P$ of $U$ is contained in exactly five of the members of $\mathcal{F}$ that belong to $U$, and hence these five members of $\mathcal{F}$ that meet the point $P$ will all belong to the same 5-dimensional subspace $T$ of $U$.

We claim that there is a 4-dimensional subspace $W$ of $U$ that does not contain any member of $\mathcal{F}$. To see this, just observe that every 3-dimensional subspace of a 5-dimensional subspace $T$ of $U$ is contained in exactly three 4-dimensional subspaces of $T$, and as $T$ contains exactly five members of $\mathcal{F}$, there will be at least 16 subspaces $W$ of dimension 4 of $T$ that do not contain any member of $\mathcal{F}$. Such a 4-dimensional subspace $W$ of $U$ will be called a poor space.
There are three 5-dimensional subspaces $T_1$, $T_2$ and $T_3$ of $U$ such that

$$W = T_1 \cap T_2 = T_1 \cap T_3 = T_2 \cap T_3$$

and

$$U = T_1 \cup T_2 \cup T_3.$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

For $1 \leq i \leq 3$, let $P_i$ be the $\alpha$-point in the space $T_i$.

We first note that none of the points $P_1$, $P_2$, or $P_3$ belongs to $W$.

To prove this fact, assume for instance that $P_1$ belongs to $W$. Since $W$ is a poor 4-dimensional space, each of the five members of $\mathcal{F}$ that belong to $U$ and contain the point $P_1$ meet $W$ in two points, besides the point $P_1$. This leads to a contradiction since $W$ contains 15 points and every point $Q \neq P_1$ in $T_1$ (and thus in $W$) belongs to exactly one of the five members of $\mathcal{F}$ in $U$ that meet the point $P_1$.

Since $\mathcal{F}$ is a $(2,3)$-spread and since the points $P_i$, $1 \leq i \leq 3$, do not belong to $W$ and they are the $\alpha$-points of the respective spaces $T_i$, we can conclude that the members of $\mathcal{F}$ that are subspaces of $T_i$ will intersect $W$ in a spread $S_i$. Furthermore, since $\mathcal{F}$ is a $(2,3)$-spread, these three spreads are mutually disjoint.

Now, let $Q$ be any point of $W$. Let $T_Q$ denote the unique 5-dimensional subspace of $U$ that contains the two members of $\mathcal{F}$ that meet the point $Q$ and belong to $T_1$ and $T_2$, respectively. We note from Equation (1) that $P_1 \notin T_2 \cup T_3$ and $P_2 \notin T_1 \cup T_3$. Hence, $T_Q$ cannot be one of the spaces $T_i$, $1 \leq i \leq 3$. As these are the only 5-dimensional subspaces of $U$ that contain $W$, it follows that

$$\dim(T_Q \cap W) \leq 3.$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

Moreover, since all 5-dimensional subspaces of $U$ have a unique point where all its members of $\mathcal{F}$ meet, and as there are two members of $\mathcal{F}$ in $T_Q$ meeting $Q$, we conclude that $Q$ is the $\alpha$-point of the space $T_Q$. This implies that the member of $\mathcal{F}$ that is a subspace of $T_3$ and meets the point $Q$ must also belong to $T_Q$. This space will be denoted by $Z_{Q,3}$; and we define $Z_{Q,1}$ and $Z_{Q,2}$ similarly. For $1 \leq i \leq 3$, the intersection of $Z_{Q,i}$ with $W$ is a 2-dimensional subspace which we denote by $L_{Q,i}$.

Now, the space $Z_{Q,3}$ is completely contained in $T_Q$ and intersects $W$ in the 2-dimensional space $L_{Q,3}$, which thus also must be a subspace of $T_Q$; so,

$$L_{Q,3} \subseteq T_Q \cap W = \langle L_{Q,1}, L_{Q,2} \rangle.$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

The last step in our proof is to show that there is at least one point $Q$ in $W$, for which the above relation does not hold.

Let us assume for a moment that

$$\mathcal{S}_1 = \{ L_1, L_2, \ldots, L_5 \} \quad \text{and} \quad \mathcal{S}_2 = \{ L'_1, L'_2, \ldots, L'_5 \}.$$  

Every member, or line, of $\mathcal{S}_2$ intersects three members of $\mathcal{S}_1$. Without loss of generality, we may assume that the line $L'_5$ does not intersect the lines
$L_1$ and $L_2$. These two lines together contain 6 points. Each of these 6 points is contained in exactly one of the lines of $S_2$. As a line contains 3 points we get that there must be two lines, say $L'_1$ and $L'_2$, of $S_2$ that meet both $L_1$ and $L_2$.

Let $Q = L_1 \cap L'_1$, $Q' = L_2 \cap L'_2$, $R_1 = L_1 \cap L'_2$ and $R_2 = L_2 \cap L'_1$, i.e., with the original notation

$$L_{Q,1} \cap L_{Q',2} = R_1 \quad \text{and} \quad L_{Q,2} \cap L_{Q',1} = R_2.$$  

Then the line $L$, that meets the points $R_1$ and $R_2$, satisfies the following relation

$$L = (R_1, R_2) = (T_Q \cap W) \cap (T_{Q'} \cap W).$$

If the relation (2) holds for all points $Q$ of $W$, then $L$ will meet both the spaces $L_{Q,3}$ and $L_{Q',3}$. Note that $L$ contains just three points, the above defined two points $R_1$ and $R_2$, and a third point $R_3$. So from Equation (3), we can infer that both the spaces $L_{Q,3}$ and $L_{Q',3}$ must meet $L$ at the point $R_3$. This contradicts the fact that $S_3$ is a spread and the proof is complete.

References

[1] K. Metsch, Bose-Burton type theorems for finite projective, Affine and Polar spaces, Surveys in Combinatorics, ed. by Lamb and Preece, London Mathematical Society, Lecture Notes Series 267, 1999.

[2] S. Thomas, Designs and partial geometries over finite fields, G. Dedicata 63 (1996), 247–253.

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