Ambiguity in terminologies used to document impact wear on projectile points: towards an improved descriptive framework.

Recently, lithic projectile points have become a key element in discussions about the complexity of Palaeolithic human behavior. The appearance of different projection systems has certainly played an important role in technological changes that occurred during the Palaeolithic. Unfortunately, only the lithic components of these projection systems are generally recovered, and over the years, several studies have focused on finding macroscopic and microscopic evidence that would allow the identification of potential lithic projectile points in the archaeological record.

Initial studies used a more typological approach to describe the morphology of the damage observed, while subsequent studies used a terminology based on the description of fracture initiations and terminations. At present, there is quite some variation in the descriptions of the wear features and fractures observed, both in their detail as in the elements that are considered as being diagnostic of projectile use. While discussion may reign about the latter, it is clear that the descriptive framework that is currently used lacks some homogeneity and if one wants to be able to evaluate the degree to which evidence may or may not be diagnostic of projectile use, it is important that we share a common vocabulary and that we agree on the fracture and wear characteristics that ought to be described. Some attributes are only mentioned infrequently, such as the size of certain removals as well as the association between different fracture types or damage features on a single piece. Independent of their potential importance, it often makes it difficult to compare the wear features observed between different researchers as well as to make robust statements about the diagnostic value of certain traces or fractures.

We present a synthesis of the variation in terminology that was identified in projectile studies and we attempt to document what researchers have referred to with specific descriptions. Above all, we would like to open discussion in view of the creation of a shared and systematic descriptive framework for wear features or fractures that may potentially result from projectile use.