

THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE ARMOIRE: LEXICAL VARIATION IN CASE FURNITURE TERMS

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ABSTRACT. This article explores the vast amount of lexical variation in case furniture terms found within databases of the Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States and the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States as well as more recent picture-elicited survey data from Georgia and Mississippi. The history of case furniture is explored briefly in order to highlight the origins of some of the lexical variation found within the data. Also discussed is the larger issue of the general pattern of lexical variation. The variation itself is addressed as the responses to the Linguistic Atlas bureau/dresser question and wardrobe question are examined more closely as well as the data from the Georgia and Mississippi picture surveys.

DATA COLLECTED FOR the Linguistic Atlas Projects captivates those interested in, among other things, lexical change and variation. The Linguistic Atlas Projects began, under the direction of Hans Kurath, in the 1920s; Kurath completed the interviews for the Linguistic Atlas of New England (LANE) in 1933 (Kurath et al. 1939, xii). The Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States (LAMSAS) data, collected by Raven McDavid and Guy Lowman in the 1930s and 1940s, span 10 states, 1,162 informants, and over 900 target items.¹ Added to LAMSAS is data from 21 interviews with Gullah speakers conducted by Lorenzo Dow Turner in the 1930s. Years later, under the direction of Lee Pederson, the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States (LAGS) added data collected in the 1970s in 8 states, from 914 primary informants. Typical of the Linguistic Atlas Projects were conversational interviews anchored by “shotgun” questions, long questions aimed at eliciting a short answer—a lexical, phonological, or grammatical “target.” The following example questions were suggested in Pederson’s (1974) *Manual for Dialect Research in the Southern States* to collect LAGS data for the bureau/dresser question (item 009.2) and the wardrobe question (item 009.7):²

1. Item 009.2

The piece of furniture in your bedroom that has drawers in it and that you put clothes in.

2. Item 009.7

If you didn’t have a built in closet, what might you have?

The goal of these interviews—the charge delivered from Hans Kurath himself—was “to secure natural, unguarded responses” (Kurath et al. 1939, 48), supplemented with questions like the ones above to nudge informants in the right direction. Because the majority of the atlas interviews were conducted in the informants’ homes, the fieldworkers would have their immediate surroundings to use as prompts as well. The result of these interviews are vast cabinetfuls of atlas worksheets on which were recorded the single-word response(s) for each question. (Most of the LAMSAS responses and all of the African American and Gullah response databases are available for browsing and map-making on the Linguistic Atlas Projects Web site: <http://us.english.uga.edu>.)

The skeptical observer might well ask: since we don’t know the specific context of each recorded response, how do we know that the responses all refer to the same target? Could the variation found within the databases for things like furniture terms simply be the result of having different furniture forms in the surrounding environment?

In order to determine whether extralinguistic influences increased the amount of variation found in the atlas bureau/dresser database, I “tested” the Linguistic Atlas Projects survey technique, pitting the variation found within its databases against my own survey data elicited by pictures of specific pieces of furniture. As described in “The Story of Chester Drawers” (Burkette 2001), this initial picture-elicited data was collected in 1998 from 60 college-age Georgia speakers. The survey collected responses for six target items (pictures of various “distinct” pieces of case furniture), the results of which demonstrated a high level of variation within the responses to each target as well as the same pattern of variation found within the Linguistic Atlas databases.

For each picture there were core and peripheral terms used to identify the visual image—the core terms eliciting the highest number of responses, the peripheral terms given much less frequently. For example, the first picture on the survey was identified by the core terms *dresser* and *chest of drawers*, which were given at frequencies of 40.0% and 35.4%, respectively. The peripheral terms *chest* and *drawers* account for 6.2% each of the responses, and *bureau* for only 3.1%. Response to the other five pictures yielded the same pattern. [2001, 141]

To the 1998 Georgia data can now be added more recent data collected via a similar survey completed by 90 college-age Mississippi respondents in 2007.³ The Mississippi survey data yields results similar to those found in 1998. But how can one tell if the same “amount” of variation exists between two sets of data; how can one quantify variation? One possibility is to look at the number of different responses given and the ratio of responses to

informants. For the initial LAMSAS bureau/dresser database, 37 different responses were given, which means that there was one response type for every 31.4 informants. In the LAGS bureau/dresser database, 36 different responses gives one response type for every 25.4 informants. The combined data from the Georgia and Mississippi picture surveys contain a total of 18 different responses; one response type for every 8.3 people. Clearly, using a visual target does not elicit less variation than the use of a traditional atlas-style question. In addition the fact that the data from each type of survey takes the same “shape,” with core and peripheral responses, suggests that the picture-elicited data sets offer comparable information to that found in the atlas databases. More detail about the shape of lexical variation, along with comparisons between the earlier atlas data sets and the more recent picture-elicited data, is found below.

A WORD ABOUT THE DATA. Before moving on to discuss more general observations about the case furniture data collected through both the atlas interviews and the subsequent picture-elicitation interviews, I would like to comment on the data decision-making practices used in dealing with both the atlas and the picture-survey data. Picture-elicitation represents a different data collection technique than that employed in the atlas interviews, and, while both efforts are aimed at collecting the same “kind” of data—specific linguistic forms (in this case, lexical items) that refer to the same item—each technique presents different challenges in terms of analyzing data sets. One difference is the fact that, from a data transcription standpoint, atlas workers go from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to normal written English, while researchers working with fill-in-the-blank surveys deal with orthographic responses. Different types of decisions are made depending on whether you are moving from the IPA to an orthographic representation of a lexical item versus moving from an individual speaker’s spelling to a lexical item. In the case of my own survey data, decisions had to be made about whether specific spelled forms were simple misspellings or whether they in fact represented a different lexical item altogether. In some cases, it appeared as though pronunciation differences emerged in spelling. In my data, *draws* was given as a response for several picture targets; does this then represent a pronunciation-based spelling for *drawers* or does this count as a separate lexical item? I decided to count *draws* as a separate item—in one sense, erring on the side of caution and, in another sense, allowing onlookers of the data to make their own decisions. However, for the many and myriad misspellings of *armoire*, the case was different. Because there were so many versions, I was inclined to treat them as true misspellings and thus counted *armour*, *armoir*, *armwar*, and the like as representative of the same lexical item.

With the atlas data, the decisions about what constitutes a lexical item are different, yet worth mentioning. For example, it seems reasonable to count plural forms with their singular counterparts, and thus in tabulating the atlas data, I counted *chest* and *chests* as the same response. I also counted modified responses such as *pine chest* and *oak chest* as belonging to the greater *chest* set, since what I am interested in here is the term used to describe a specific form (and not the various media from which the form can be made).

This examination of lexical variation in case furniture terms will turn first to the history of the wardrobe form, then to the pattern of variation found in the bureau/dresser and wardrobe data sets, and finally to a discussion of the data themselves.

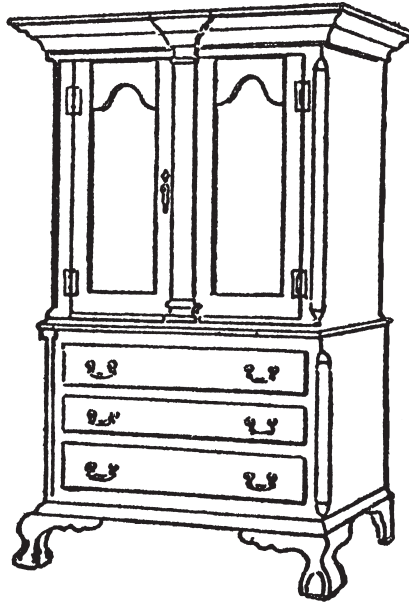
A PARALLEL HISTORY

Burkette (2001) looks at the history of case furniture in general, focusing on the evolution of the chest of drawers form and the developments that occurred in the physical manufacture of this piece of furniture. I uncovered the terms, labels, and names applied to different incarnations of the chest of drawers at various times and found that language variation is indeed the trace of change. Diachronic developments in both the shapes of and labels for these chests result in synchronic lexical variation. The present article seeks to further this argument with an investigation of a parallel history, a closely related piece of case furniture: the wardrobe. (The following history was compiled from Nutting 1928; Ormsbee 1934, 1951; Butler 1983; Boyce 1985; Harrison 1997; the *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED2] 1989; and Moscou 2007.)

Our story begins with the turning of the simple wooden box on its side. Shelves are added to the uprighted box along with panel doors that close to protect and store household goods. The CUPBOARD. This one piece is the common ancestor of both the chest of drawers and the wardrobe.

The rudimentary cupboard form becomes, in its medieval life, the PRESS, which is a simply constructed, sometimes painted, often massive, cupboard. Figure 1 is an illustration of a more contemporary version of the press, with the more modern additions of a cornice and short feet made to the basic box-with-panel-doors construction.

During the reign of William and Mary (and during the furniture period thus named), Dutch cabinetmakers were brought to England; the subsequent furniture and furniture styles demonstrated a mixture of Dutch and English design elements, and it was this “mix” that cabinetmakers brought to early America.

FIGURE 1
The Press

The press form acquires different lexical and physical forms as it travels across cultures, and several of this form's more specialized descendants can be observed—both structurally and linguistically—within the history of American case furniture. The initial offshoot of the press appears to have been the *wardrobe* form, consisting of a cupboard stacked atop a chest of drawers. The word *wardrobe* was taken from the medieval word for a guarded room, usually one adjoining a sleeping chamber, set aside to store clothes, linens, and other valuables.⁴ (This type of room was also commonly used to store armor, hence the French word for the same kind of room and, later, the similar furniture form: *armoire*.)

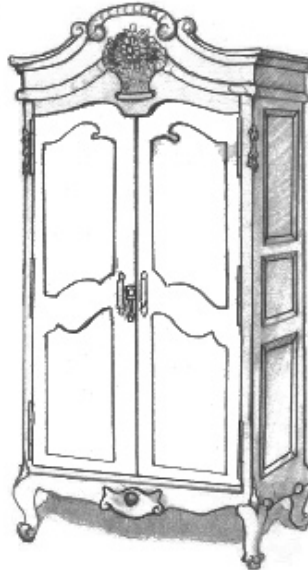
Eventually this form becomes a case with paneled doors set atop a drawer, topped by a cornice and set upon feet (often, the cornice and/or feet were removable to make the piece easier to move). The wardrobe carries on, with this four-part construction, in England, sometimes called a *CLOTHES PRESS*, a version of the form that often had drawers behind the doors as well as beneath them. In seventeenth-century New England, this piece was also referred to as the *PRESS CUPBOARD*, a massive and heavy piece found mainly in New England (Lockwood 1913, 152–54). The press form is also a cousin to the *COURT CUPBOARD* or *LIVERY CUPBOARD* (both of which have

open instead of closed lower halves), referenced mainly in earlier colonial Southern American estate inventories (152).

Other European forms migrated to the New World as well. In seventeenth-century Germany, we see the SCHRANK (sometimes heard as *shonk*), a massive piece brought to the American settlement of the Pennsylvania Dutch. The decorative patterns painted on this piece reflected the Swiss influence on this German form. The KAST (also called *kas* and with *kasten* as plural) was the seventeenth-century Dutch contribution to early American case furniture forms. In the United States, this wardrobe variant was found among the Dutch settlers in New York's Hudson River Valley area and along the New Jersey Long Island shore. *Kast* is the Dutch word for 'cupboard', but took on a meaning among American furniture purveyors of a wardrobe form that is very large (almost wall-sized) with bulbous, attached feet (its cousin, the *shrank*, had feet that were squared and attached as an integral part of the molding underneath the drawer). The French form is the ARMOIRE (see figure 2), a piece that is big, often decorated, usually found with no drawer below the paneled doors, and often with no feet.

From sixteenth-century Italian furniture makers, we have the form (in Italian called *armadio* or *guardaroba*) of the CABINET, a cupboard-like space filled with small compartments or drawers and fronted, once again, by

FIGURE 2
Armoire



paneled doors. Thus, to America and American vocabulary came various European-inspired constructions: the wardrobe, the press cupboard, the Schrank, the kast, and the armoire, all of which are variations of the basic medieval cupboard form described above.

Continued contact with France and interest in French fashions, especially in areas surrounding Charleston and New Orleans, ushered in additional French-inspired furniture forms and terms as part of the (American) Empire furniture period following the War of 1812. Among the case furniture terms, we see *commode*, *chiffonier*, and *divan*, as well as other furniture terms such as *bergere*, *buffet*, *chaise*, *divan*, *étagère*, and *recamier*.

New Orleans specifically served as the cultural hearth of the Gulf States area, and its cabinetmakers, including the famous “freemen of color,” produced a wardrobe form made in “Creole style”—a blend of influences from the Caribbean, Louisiana French, and other Anglo-American styles. This rather ornate piece was the New Orleans cabinetmakers’ signature piece: the ARMOIRE. Even the trusty chest of drawers fell to the “ubiquitous armoire” as the chosen household piece of case furniture (Moscou 2007). The armoire remained popular until the greater American trend toward Empire style finally took over in the late nineteenth century. Even after the Empire style entered New Orleans, the traditional chest of drawers form was passed over

FIGURE 3
Chiffonier



in favor of the SEMAINIER, a tall, slender, seven-drawer chest called after the French *semaine* ‘week’.

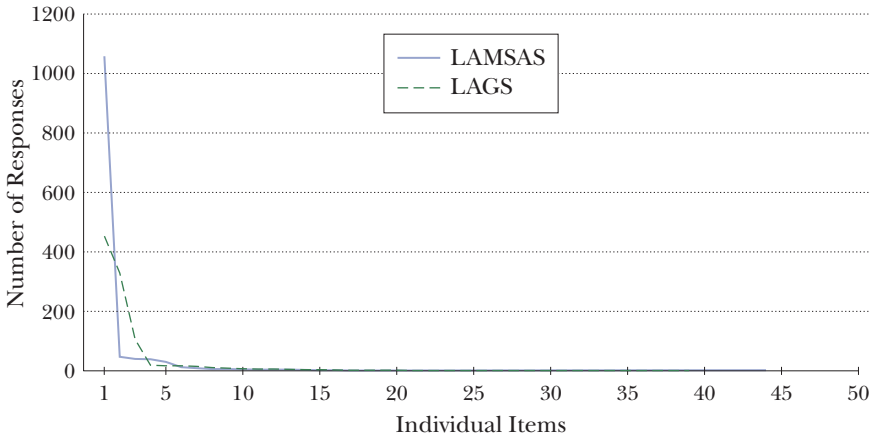
Though the term *semainier* is not found among the LAGS responses, its use in New Orleans could, in fact, have contributed to the longevity of *chiffonier*, a term found in both the LAMSAS and LAGS databases as a response for both bureau/dresser and wardrobe questions (figure 3). *Chiffonier* was borrowed from French, derived from *chiffon* ‘rag’. A CHIFFONIER is a tall, slender chest of drawers, a description very similar to that of a *semainier*; in fact, the *Dictionary of Furniture* defines *semainier* as a “chest of drawers, often a *chiffonnier*, with seven drawers” (Boyce 1985, 270). Structural similarities coupled with phonological similarity—[ʃifonje] and [semanje]—could have led to the “merger” of the two forms and terms into one.

THE PATTERN OF VARIATION

Both the original Linguistic Atlas Projects data and data gathered through picture-elicitation surveys demonstrate the same pattern of variation. Each target item begets a large amount of variation, even when that target item is a picture. Within that variation, one finds core terms, the one or two or perhaps three terms (if the database is a large one) that appear most frequently. Along with the core term(s), one also finds a swath of peripheral terms, terms that are given much less frequently, most only once. For example, within the LAMSAS database, the core response for the wardrobe question is *wardrobe*, given as a response 1,058 times. After *wardrobe*, the next most frequent responses, *clothes press*, *chifforobe*, and *press*, are given only 48, 40, and 39 times, respectively, a sharp drop in frequency that signals the move from core to peripheral responses. Within the LAGS database, we see three core terms, *wardrobe* (given 453 times), *chifforobe* (329), and *armoire* (106), followed by the peripheral responses *closet* (19), *cedarrobe* (17), and *clothespress* (17). Figure 4 shows the distribution of terms for the wardrobe question in both LAMSAS and LAGS. Note also that, for both databases, the most common frequency of occurrence is one—the LAMSAS data set contains 28 terms that appear only once; LAGS contains 19 “onesies.” Charted simply, the relationship between response frequency and number of responses results in the familiar asymptotic curve (A-curve) described by Zipf’s Law and found throughout the study of language (Kretzschmar 2008; 2009, 151–52).

The A-curve is, as Kretzschmar describes, an “overwhelming distributional pattern that we can observe in aggregated language data,” a “power law” that appears when graphing the frequency of linguistic atlas lexical variants, phonological variants, and any other “ranked frequencies of the variants for

FIGURE 4
Response Frequencies for the Wardrobe Question in LAMSAS and LAGS



any linguistic feature” (Kretzschmar 2008, 339). This pattern is pervasive: it applies to graphs of complete atlas databases (such as those found in figure 4) and various subsets of atlas data (e.g., data from one region, one state, or even one sex) (Kretzschmar 2008, 340).

Figure 5 illustrates the same pattern of variation for the survey data collected for the dresser with mirror picture (see figure 6). For the Georgia respondents, *dresser* was the most common response (given 27 times) and

FIGURE 5
Response Frequencies for the Dresser with Mirror Picture
in the Georgia and Mississippi Survey Data

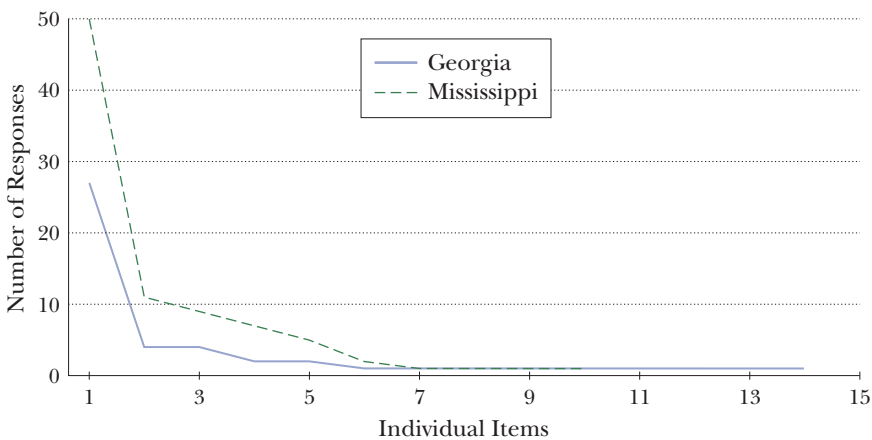
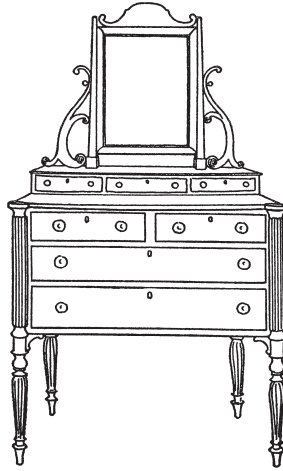


FIGURE 6
Dresser with Mirror



the next most common response was *chest of drawers* (given 4 times). For the Mississippi respondents, *dresser* was also a core term (given 50 times), followed by the drop to 11 responses for *vanity*. This pattern of variation, then, includes a few (between one and three) core terms, a sharp drop in number of responses, followed by many peripheral terms. This pattern surfaces in the responses for other case furniture terms as well. Figure 7 contain the A-curves representative of the variation found in the LAMSAS bureau/dresser

FIGURE 7
Response Frequencies for the Bureau/Dresser Question in LAMSAS and LAGS

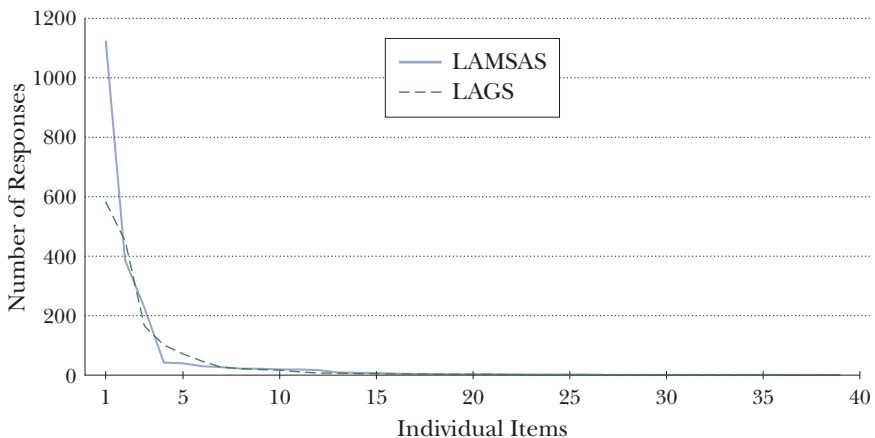
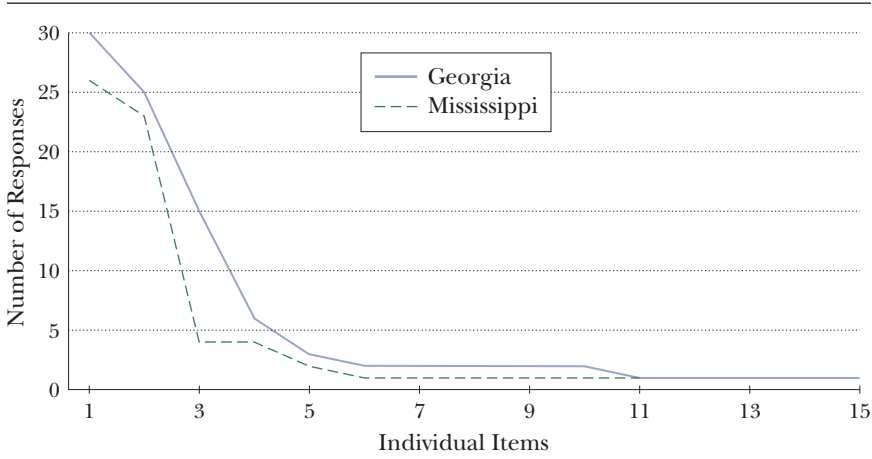
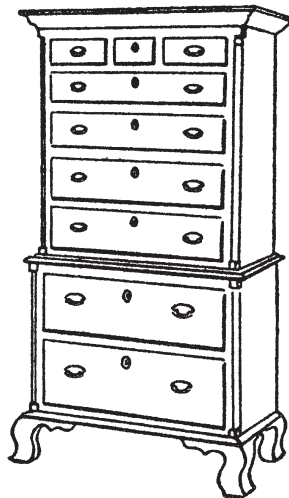


FIGURE 8
Response Frequencies for the Chest on Chest Picture
in the Georgia and Mississippi Survey Data



question responses and corresponding LAGS bureau/dresser question responses. In addition, figure 8 represent the same pattern of response distribution, elicited by the chest on chest picture (see figure 9), present in both the Georgia and Mississippi surveys.

FIGURE 9
Chest on Chest



This A-curve pattern holds not only when one looks at the number of times an individual term is given as a response (the frequency of occurrence of a response), but also when looking at how the frequency of occurrences are themselves distributed (the frequency of frequencies).

THE RESPONSES

With the general pattern of lexical variation established, let us turn now to the responses themselves. Table 1 contains the top five responses for the bureau/dresser question and the picture in figure 10, as well as the wardrobe question and wardrobe picture in figure 11 from each data set. (Unfortunately, there was no wardrobe picture included with the 1998 picture survey.)

WARDROBE. For the wardrobe question, there are 44 different responses in the LAMSAS database and 39 different responses from LAGS informants (see table 2). A little over 30% (19/63) of the total number of responses in these databases is shared. Both sets of data have the same most frequent term, *wardrobe*, which was the overwhelming response in the 1930s and 1940s, although it accounts for slightly less than half of the responses in LAGS and, moving ahead in time, only 10% of the Mississippi picture responses in 2007 (see table 3).

The marked difference between the top five terms for ‘wardrobe’ in these databases is the respective positions of *chifforobe*, which accounts for less

TABLE 1
Five Most Frequent Responses to the Bureau/Dresser and Wardrobe Questions
from LAMSAS and LAGS and the Dresser Picture
from the Georgia and Mississippi Surveys

Bureau/Dresser Responses			
LAMSAS (1930–40s)	LAGS (1970s)	Ga. Survey (1998)	Miss. Survey (2007)
bureau (55.0%)	dresser (37.0%)	dresser (40.0%)	dresser (39.8%)
dresser (18.9%)	chest of drawers (28.6%)	chest of drawers (31.7%)	chest of drawers (22.6%)
chest of drawers (11.0%)	bureau (10.6%)	drawers (10.0%)	drawers (12.9%)
chest (2.1%)	chifforobe (6.5%)	chest (5.0%)	chest (10.8%)
sideboard (2.0%)	chest (4.5%)	nightstand (5.0%)	chester drawer (4.3%)
Wardrobe Responses			
LAMSAS (1930–40s)	LAGS (1970s)	Ga. Survey (1998)	Miss. Survey (2007)
wardrobe (81.4%)	wardrobe (43.6%)	no data available	armoire (42.9%)
clothes press (3.7%)	chifforobe (31.7%)		cabinet (13.0%)
chifforobe (3.1%)	armoire (10.2%)		wardrobe (10.4%)
press (3.0%)	closet (1.8%)		dresser (6.5%)
wardroom (2.3%)	cedarrobe (1.6%)		bureau (5.2%)

FIGURE 10
Dresser



FIGURE 11
Wardrobe

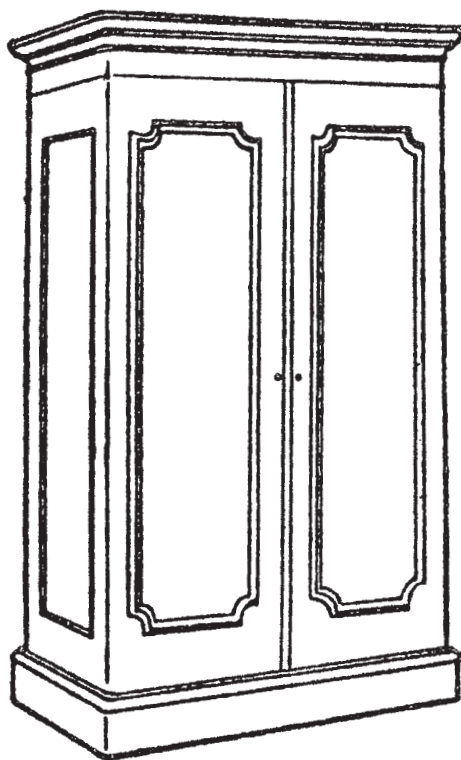


TABLE 2
Linguistic Atlas Responses for the Wardrobe Question

<i>LAMSAS Response</i>			<i>LAGS Response</i>		
wardrobe	1,058	81.38%	wardrobe	453	43.64%
clothes press	48	3.69%	chifforobe	329	31.70%
clifforobe	40	3.08%	armoie	106	10.21%
press	39	3.00%	closet	19	1.83%
wardroom	30	2.31%	cedarrobe	17	1.64%
clothes closet	12	0.92%	clothespress	17	1.64%
cupboard	9	0.69%	clothes closet	15	1.45%
closet	6	0.46%	chest	11	1.06%
trunk	6	0.46%	cabinet	9	0.87%
cedar chest	5	0.38%	bureau	7	0.67%
armoie	4	0.31%	chiffonier	6	0.58%
cabinet	4	0.31%	clothes chest	6	0.58%
clothes cabinet	4	0.31%	clothes rack	5	0.48%
clothes cupboard	3	0.23%	cupboard	4	0.39%
clothes chest	2	0.15%	rack	4	0.39%
robeward	2	0.15%	robe	3	0.29%
bookcase	1	0.08%	clothes cabinet	2	0.19%
box wardrobe	1	0.08%	clothes shelves	2	0.19%
case	1	0.08%	highboy	2	0.19%
chiffonier	1	0.08%	Schrank	2	0.19%
china closet	1	0.08%	bedroom safe	1	0.10%
closing rack	1	0.08%	caboose	1	0.10%
clothes drawers	1	0.08%	chiffonette	1	0.10%
clothes horse	1	0.08%	chiffonrobe	1	0.10%
clothes rack	1	0.08%	dresser	1	0.10%
clothes shelf	1	0.08%	divan	1	0.10%
clothes tree	1	0.08%	high top	1	0.10%
clothes ward	1	0.08%	Kleiderschrank	1	0.10%
combination	1	0.08%	press	1	0.10%
commode	1	0.08%	quilt pack	1	0.10%
costumer	1	0.08%	ropero	1	0.10%
dish cupboard	1	0.08%	safe closet	1	0.10%
gentleman's wardrobe	1	0.08%	standing trunk	1	0.10%
highboy	1	0.08%	tall boy	1	0.10%
Kleidereck	1	0.08%	tally	1	0.10%
locker	1	0.08%	wardrobe chest	1	0.10%
quiltbox	1	0.08%	wardrobe closet	1	0.10%
robe	1	0.08%	wardrobe trunk	1	0.10%
side ward	1	0.08%	wardroom	1	0.10%
sideboard	1	0.08%			1,038
upright bureau	1	0.08%			
vanity	1	0.08%			
ward	1	0.08%			
wardrobe closet	1	0.08%			
	1,300				

TABLE 3
Mississippi Survey Responses to the Wardrobe Picture

armoire	33	42.86%
cabinet	10	12.99%
wardrobe	8	10.39%
dresser	5	6.49%
bureau	4	5.19%
closet	4	5.19%
chest	3	3.90%
chiffanrobe	3	3.90%
cabinet set	1	1.30%
chiffarobe	1	1.30%
china cabinet	1	1.30%
closet dresser	1	1.30%
cubboard	1	1.30%
drawer	1	1.30%
shift robe	1	1.30%
	77	

than 4% of the LAMSAS responses, but makes up almost a third of the LAGS responses. *Chifforobe* is still present within the Mississippi survey responses. If one takes *chiffanrobe* and *chiffarobe* as pronunciation-based spellings of *chifforobe*, then the term is present in the vocabularies of 4 of 77 young adults in 2007. A similar correspondence between LAGS and the Mississippi survey data exists for *armoire*, which accounts for 10.2% of the LAGS responses and 42.9% of the 2007 Mississippi responses (compare this to *armoire* as a mere 0.3% of the LAMSAS responses). Granted, the situation makes the lack of ‘wardrobe’ responses for the 1998 Georgia speakers all the more vexing; however, it could be that *armoire* makes such a strong showing in the Mississippi data because of its association with New Orleans and the fact that New Orleans was the cultural hearth of much of the Gulf States area. Indeed, the cultural and linguistic influence of New Orleans may have reached well beyond the Gulf States. The *OED2* documents the three earliest uses of *armoire* in English texts dating from 1571, 1823, and 1836, but includes editorial “tramlines” beside the headword, indicating that the word was considered not yet “naturalized” into English, and would instead have been considered “alien.”⁵ Thus, the term *armoire* most likely did not travel to the United States as part of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century English, and its appearance (and later widespread use) in the United States, then, would necessarily be from another source. In fact, the first citation for *armoire* in both *The Dictionary of American English* (1938–44) and *The Dictionary of American Regional English*

(DARE 1985-) is from Henry Marie Brackenridge's *Recollections of Persons and Places in the West* (1834), composed while he was serving as a district court judge in the Orleans Territory of Louisiana. This suggests that New Orleans may have very well been the point of introduction of *armoire* into general American speech.

Also interesting is the fact that *wardrobe* is only the third most frequent response in the 2007 Mississippi survey, behind both *armoire* and *cabinet*. Obviously, the breadth of responses is much greater when one has large amounts of survey data; yet even within the comparatively small data set of 77 responses, there is the presence of a handful of the more common peripheral terms from the older, larger atlas surveys: *cabinet*, *dresser*, *bureau*, *closet*, *chest*, *cubbard*, and (in various spellings) *chifforobe*.

It is worth noting that *bureau*, given as a response only once in LAMSAS data for the wardrobe question (as part of *upright bureau*), is found 7 times in the LAGS data set. Perhaps its familiarity, being the most frequent response in the 1930s and 1940s for the bureau/dresser question, helped this term to shift its meaning, giving it greater staying power in the larger category of case furniture.

The LAGS responses reflect the many cultural influences present in the Gulf States area. Part of this is the result of the effort made by the LAGS project to reflect with its informant selection the demographics of the areas surveyed; LAGS informant selection was prioritized according to "distinctive ethnic groups . . . in those communities where they formerly prevailed or currently endure, e.g., the descendants of Georgia Salzburgers; Florida Minorcans, Cubans, and Jamaicans; Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana French; Louisiana Belgians; and Texas Mexicans, Germans, and Czechs" (Pederson 1974, 21). In addition, the LAGS data includes responses from 40 speakers of English as a second language, "10 Spanish/English speakers in Texas and Florida, 24 French/English in Louisiana, five German/English in Texas and Arkansas, and one Choctaw/English in Mississippi" (Montgomery and Nunnally 1998, 12). Thus, the LAGS wardrobe question data set includes *Schrank* (German 'cabinet'), *Kleiderschrank* (German 'clothes cabinet'), and *ropero* (Spanish 'wardrobe'). Though certainly from varying ancestral backgrounds, the LAMSAS informants' language backgrounds were more limited in that they were nearly all very likely to have been monolingual English speakers—with one notable exception. There was one Pennsylvania Deutch speaker who responded to the wardrobe question with *Kleiderock* (German 'clothing corner'),⁶ in addition to a host of French-descended items (popular in Low Country areas influenced by French fashion and merchandise flowing in and out of Charleston), such as *chiffonier*, *divan*, and *armoire*, all of which are found within both LAMSAS and LAGS databases.

Also amid the ‘wardrobe’ databases occur some interesting blends and compounds. *Chifforobe* is a blend of *wardrobe* and *chiffonier*, a form that may reflect function. *Chiffonier* ‘smaller, slighter stack of drawers’ combines with *wardrobe* ‘two tall doors and clothes rack inside’ to create the *chifforobe*, a wider piece with two tall doors, but shelves on one half inside and a narrower rack for hanging on the other. Both the *ward* and *robe* parts of *wardrobe* appear very productive. LAMSAS has *clothes ward*, *wardroom* (which is the preferred response of the Gullah informants), *sideward* (*sideboard* blended with *wardrobe*), and both *robe* and *ward* by themselves in addition to *robeward* (which appears twice within the LAMSAS responses). LAGS has *robe* also, along with *cedarrobe* and *chiffonrobe* (listed by the LAGS transcribers as a separate item from *chifforobe*). The Mississippi survey data also has one response, *shift robe*, which reflects nicely two of the spelling variations of *chifforobe* listed in *DARE*, *chiffrobe* and *shifferobe*, one phonologically and one orthographically. In addition, a folk etymology could be at work when one considers that *chiffon* sounds like *shift* (especially if there is consonant cluster deletion at work in the latter), which seems like a reasonable thing to call an old-fashioned piece of furniture in which one might hang a nightgown.

Within the atlas data, there are also many names that reflect the piece’s purpose: from LAMSAS we see *clothes press*, *clothes closet*, *clothes cabinet*, *clothes cupboard*, *clothes chest*, *clothes drawers*, *clothes rack*, *clothes shelf*, *clothes tree*, *clothes ward*, *clothes horse*, *dish cupboard*, *china closet*, and *quiltbox*. We see a similar trend in the LAGS data with *clothespress*,⁷ *clothes closet*, *clothes chest*, *clothes rack*, *clothes cabinet*, *clothes shelves*, and *quilt pack*. These types of responses are mostly onesies and are not found in the Mississippi survey data, as logic would suggest that the more responses one has, the more single-responses one gets. Also, it might be that the presence of more function-oriented items is in answer to a more function-oriented question (e.g., “if you didn’t have a built-in closet, what might you have?”) rather than a picture of a specific piece.

Many of the onesies in the atlas databases are compounds of case furniture-related terms, such as *safe closet* (*safe*, for a while, being a near synonym of *trunk*). In addition to the *clothes*-series mentioned above, we also see compounds with *wardrobe*, such as *wardrobe chest*, *wardrobe closet*, *wardrobe trunk*, and *box wardrobe*, all of which are single-response items. Several other one-time responses are derivations of core or other more common terms, such as *chiffonette*. Looking at the one-time responses, the LAMSAS and LAGS lists look very different; the LAMSAS list contains many older terms that reflect the history of the piece and its relationship to the chest of drawers form (*case*, *commode*, *costumer*, *sideboard*), while the LAGS list evidences the influence of other languages (*divan*, *Kleiderschrank*, *ropero*). In terms of responses given more than once, the lists more closely resemble each other. The LAMSAS

database contains 16 terms given more than once; the LAGS database 20. Of the responses given more than once, 10 are found in both databases. Taking entire databases into consideration, there is only one term that appears more than once in the LAMSAS responses that does not appear at all in LAGS, *robeward* (given twice). Likewise, there are two terms that occurs in the LAGS database more than once and do not appear at all in the LAMSAS list, *cedar-robe* (17 responses) and *Schrank* (two responses). This suggests that it is the high end of the A-curve that makes us able to talk to each other at all, and it is the low end that accounts for more local or idiolectal variation.

BUREAU/DRESSER. The LAMSAS database contains 39 responses for the bureau/dresser question, while the LAGS database contains 36 (see table 4). Of a combined 57 different responses, only 18 (31.6%) are shared. What in the 1930s and 1940s was the bureau question had indeed become the dresser question by the 1970s, a change that reflects a greater lexical change in progress. *Bureau*, the most frequently given item in the LAMSAS data, accounting for 55.0% of the responses, falls behind both *dresser* and *chest of drawers*, accounting for only 10.6% of the LAGS responses. *Dresser* and *chest of drawers* are still at the top of the list 20–30 years later in Georgia and Mississippi. *Bureau* is still present in 1998 and 2007; it appears in response to four different pictures and is given as a response a total of 14 times: 3 in response to the dresser with mirror picture (figure 6), 3 in response to the plain dresser picture (figure 10), 4 in response to the chest on chest picture (figure 9), and 4 in response to the wardrobe picture (figure 11) (see tables 3 and 5–7). Overall, the five most frequent responses from the Georgia and Mississippi respondents to the dresser picture (figure 10) were very similar, with *chest* and *drawers* following the two most frequent responses in both cases.

Many of the LAMSAS responses for the bureau/dresser question reflect the history of this particular piece of case furniture (e.g., *stand of drawers*, *case of drawers*); the relationship between these responses and the changes that occurred in the chest of drawers form have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Burkette 2001). Fewer of LAGS responses appear directly related to the development of the chest of drawers form. Instead, the LAGS responses reflect the same sort of productivity as was seen in the wardrobe databases. Thus, we have variations on a theme: *chest of drawers*, *dresser drawers*, *bureau drawers*, *chest in drawers*, *chest with drawers*, *chest of draws*, as well as *chester* and *chester drawers*. The majority of these compounded forms appear in the LAGS list only once. In addition to the “loss” of older terms, we also see the appearance of newer ones (or at least ones that do not appear in the earlier

TABLE 4
Linguistic Atlas Responses for the Bureau/Dresser Question

<i>LAMSAS Response</i>			<i>LAGS Response</i>		
bureau	1,125	54.96%	dresser	583	37.04%
dresser	387	18.91%	chest of drawers	450	28.59%
chest of drawers	227	11.09%	bureau	166	10.55%
chest	42	2.05%	chiffonrobe	102	6.48%
sideboard	40	1.95%	chest	71	4.51%
washstand	30	1.46%	washstand	47	2.99%
highboy	27	1.32%	chiffonier	27	1.72%
chiffonier	22	1.07%	vanity	22	1.40%
trunk	22	1.07%	dresser drawers	19	1.21%
drawers	19	0.93%	highboy	17	1.08%
bureau drawers	19	0.93%	dressing table	11	0.70%
commode	17	0.83%	chester	7	0.44%
dressing table	9	0.44%	nightstand	7	0.44%
box	8	0.39%	bureau drawers	5	0.32%
stand	7	0.34%	cedarrobe	5	0.32%
lowboy	5	0.24%	drawers	4	0.25%
chest on chest	4	0.20%	sideboard	4	0.25%
vanity	4	0.20%	lowboy	3	0.19%
desk	3	0.15%	vanity dresser	3	0.19%
case of drawers	3	0.15%	commode	3	0.19%
dresser of drawers	3	0.15%	safe	3	0.19%
wash hands stand	3	0.15%	chest in drawers	1	0.06%
drawer	2	0.10%	chest on chest	1	0.06%
stand of drawers	2	0.10%	chest with drawers	1	0.06%
set of drawers	2	0.10%	chester drawers	1	0.06%
wardroom	2	0.10%	clothes chest	1	0.06%
blanket chest	1	0.05%	clothes drawer	1	0.06%
bookcases	1	0.05%	clothespress	1	0.06%
cabinet	1	0.05%	convenience	1	0.06%
cabinet table	1	0.05%	dresserette	1	0.06%
checkrobes	1	0.05%	lingerie chest	1	0.06%
chest upon chest	1	0.05%	toilette	1	0.06%
clothespress	1	0.05%	vanity chest	1	0.06%
clothes stand	1	0.05%	wardrobe	1	0.06%
chifforobe drawers	1	0.05%	wash table	1	0.06%
cupboard	1	0.05%	washstand dresser	1	0.06%
kast	1	0.05%		1,574	
vanity dresser	1	0.05%			
wardrobe	1	0.05%			
	2,047				

TABLE 5
Georgia and Mississippi Survey Responses to Dresser with Mirror Picture

Dresser with Mirror Picture					
<i>Georgia Response</i>			<i>Mississippi Response</i>		
dresser	27	61.36%	dresser	50	54.35%
chest of drawers	4	9.09%	vanity	11	11.96%
drawers	4	9.09%	dresser with mirror	9	9.78%
bureau	2	4.55%	chest	7	7.61%
desk	2	4.55%	desk	5	5.43%
cabinet	1	2.27%	drawers with mirror	2	2.17%
chest	1	2.27%	armoire	1	1.09%
dressing table	1	2.27%	bureau	1	1.09%
vanity	1	2.27%	cabinet	1	1.09%
vanity table	1	2.27%	chest of draws	1	1.09%
	44		chest with mirror	1	1.09%
			drawer	1	1.09%
			dresser drawer	1	1.09%
			vanity with drawers	1	1.09%
				92	

TABLE 6
Georgia and Mississippi Survey Responses to Chest on Chest Picture

Chest on Chest Picture					
<i>Georgia Response</i>			<i>Mississippi Response</i>		
dresser	26	40.00%	chest of drawers	30	31.91%
chest of drawers	23	35.38%	dresser	25	26.60%
chest	4	6.15%	chest	15	15.96%
drawers	4	6.15%	drawers	6	6.38%
bureau	2	3.08%	chester drawers	3	3.19%
armoire	1	1.54%	armoire	2	2.13%
cabinet	1	1.54%	bureau	2	2.13%
chester drawers	1	1.54%	chest drawer	2	2.13%
dresser drawer	1	1.54%	chester	2	2.13%
highboard	1	1.54%	chester drawer	2	2.13%
highboy	1	1.54%	audobon	1	1.06%
	65		chest of draws	1	1.06%
			chest	1	1.06%
			highboy	1	1.06%
			dresser drawer	1	1.06%
				94	

TABLE 7
Georgia and Mississippi Survey Responses to Dresser Picture

<i>Georgia Response</i>			<i>Mississippi Response</i>		
dresser	24	40.00%	dresser	37	39.78%
chest of drawers	19	31.67%	chest of drawers	21	22.58%
drawers	6	10.00%	drawers	12	12.90%
chest	3	5.00%	chest	10	10.75%
night stand	3	5.00%	chester drawer	4	4.30%
cabinet	2	3.33%	bureau	2	2.15%
bureau	1	1.67%	chester	2	2.15%
dressing table	1	1.67%	buffet dresser	1	1.08%
vanity	1	1.67%	chest drawer	1	1.08%
	60		chest of draws	1	1.08%
			night stand	1	1.08%
			chess	1	1.08%
				93	

LAMSAS data), such as *cedarrobe* (also a common response for the wardrobe question), *convenience*, and *dresserette*.

As was the case with the wardrobe responses, the LAMSAS and LAGS data sets share most of the terms given more than once. Of these more common peripheral and core terms, the LAGS data contains six terms not found within the LAMSAS bureau/dresser database: *chiffonrobe*, *dresser drawers* (though LAMSAS has other combinations that include “drawers” and also has *dresser of drawers*), *chester*, *nightstand* (which appears to be a newer term), *cedarrobe* (which was also a popular LAGS response for ‘wardrobe’), and *safe*. In contrast, the LAMSAS data set contains 12 nonsingle response terms not found amid the LAGS responses: *trunk*, *box*, *stand*, *desk*, *case of drawers*, *dresser of drawers*, *wash hands stand*, *drawer*, *stand of drawers*, *set of drawers*, and *wardroom*. Once again, most of these terms refer to the variations in physical construction of the form found throughout its history.

FURTHER PICTURE-ELICITED VARIATION. Four pictures from the 1998 and 2007 picture-elicitation survey overlap: a basic dresser (figure 10), a larger chest on chest (figure 9), a dresser with a mirror (figure 6), and a wardrobe (figure 13), the responses to which were discussed above. For the dresser picture, both the Georgia and Mississippi informants use the same two core terms: *dresser* was given most frequently for each group, accounting for approximately 40.0% of each data set’s responses, followed by *chest of drawers* (31.7% of the Georgia responses and almost 22.6% of the Mississippi responses). The states also share the first two peripheral responses, *chest*

and *drawers*, as well as the less frequently given terms *night stand* and *bureau*, but differ on the remaining terms. *Cabinet* is given twice by the Georgia informants, *dressing table* and *vanity* once. The Mississippi data contain more different responses, many of which reflect variations in pronunciation (*chester* and *chester drawers, draws*).

The chest on chest picture presents informants with a form that is a bit more complicated than the simple dresser discussed above. For this picture, the most frequent response from the two groups differs, though the two core terms are the same. The most common Georgia response was *dresser* (40.0%) while the most common Mississippi response was *chest of drawers* (31.9%). Both groups include *bureau, armoire, chester drawers, dresser drawer, and highboy* among their responses. The Georgia list also includes *cabinet, chester drawers, and highboard*, while the Mississippi group responded with *chest drawer, chester, audobon, and chest of draws*. The dresser with mirror picture garnered 10 different Georgia responses and 14 different Mississippi responses and, although both data sets share the same most frequent response, the response lists are more different than alike. The Georgia responses include *dressing table* and *vanity table*, while the Mississippi responses vary along *drawers* and *with mirror* themes (e.g., *dresser with mirror, drawers with mirror, vanity with drawers*). Overall, the picture-elicited responses evidence elements that are both historical and creative.

CONCLUSION

What can we take away from these vast amounts of data? First of all, from the picture-elicited responses, we see that picture elicitation generates a great deal of lexical variation. We also see that the Georgia and Mississippi data sets, though they share core terms, differ in their peripheral terms—each group having its own preferences for types of peripheral terms. Given the earlier data collected by the LAMSAS and LAGS surveys and the fact that it is less than a decade that separates the Georgia and Mississippi surveys, it is reasonable to assume that it is regional variation that separates these two groups. One bit of evidence for this is the frequent appearance of *armoire* in the Mississippi survey data, which links the Mississippi responses with the larger regional trend toward *armoire* in the LAGS wardrobe question data.

The internal variation found within individual case furniture databases stems from a collusion of forces, both historical and social. The history of case furniture forms provides a well of lexical forms from which speakers can draw. Variation between the LAMSAS and LAGS responses most likely results from distances both temporal and regional. In the wardrobe data sets, we

do see that the Gulf States show an increasing preference for *armoire*, which is most likely a regional distribution. Of the four *armoire* responses in the LAMSAS data, three were given in South Carolina and one in Georgia (the LAMSAS Georgia communities are ones that border LAGS territory). And so, laden with terms from the physical development of the pieces, the A-curve applies for both sets of data regional preferences simply place individual responses at different points on the curve. For the bureau/dresser data, we see differences that are probably temporal. We see the gradual “fall” of *bureau* from most frequent core response in LAMSAS to most frequent peripheral response in LAGS to the general periphery in the more recent surveys (*bureau* occurs twice in the Georgia data and once in the Mississippi data as a response for the dresser picture). Thus, the atlas data and subsequent picture survey data offer a good example of a fundamental truth about linguistic variation: “Since . . . any linguistic feature exists in many variants at any time, there will always be a pool of variants, each of which may either increase or decrease in frequency” (Kretschmar 2009, 269). That pool is filled by history, by the physical changes in referents, by changes in the needs of speakers, and by the influences of other languages. There is no way to predict one word’s swing, back and forth along the A-curve, but it is descriptively comforting to note that the A-curve, that simple representation of distribution, is a dependable description of ever-present variation.

Even in the face of mass-produced furniture, as knowledge of specific furniture histories and forms becomes more and more the sole jurisdiction of collectors and dealers, linguistic variation still abounds when “normal” people are asked to name pieces of furniture. College-age informants who participated in the picture surveys still use historically based peripheral terms as well as other processes—blending, compounding—to produce the same amount and pattern of variation found in the atlas surveys.

NOTES

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 75th Southeastern Conference on Linguistics (SECOL 75) in Knoxville, Tennessee (Apr. 3–5, 2008), at which time a couple of University of Georgia graduate students mentioned the movie that suggested the title, for which I am grateful. I would like to thank especially Chris Sapp (for solving the “glaide reck” mystery), Bill Kretschmar for sharing his book and for information about LAMSAS informants (“nearly all very likely”), and Michael Adams for his (as always) excellent editorial advice. I would also like to thank Allen Clark, Tamara Warhol, Don Dyer, and Felice Coles for additional comments and encouragements.

Thanks also go to Nathan Burkhalter, who kindly provided the illustrations in figures 2 and 3. The remaining furniture drawings are from Ormsbee (1951), which was illustrated by Norman B. Palmstrom.

1. Most of the target items were lexical targets, though there were phonological and grammatical targets as well.
2. I use the phrase “bureau/dresser question” to refer to LAGS item 009.2 and its LAMSAS equivalent because *bureau* and *dresser* are the most frequent responses given by LAMSAS and LAGS participants, respectively. Similarly, I use “wardrobe question” to refer to LAGS item 009.7 and its LAMSAS equivalent because *wardrobe* was the most frequent response given by participants in both LAMSAS and LAGS.
3. Due to advances in technology and increased availability of online images, slightly different renderings of the furniture pieces were used for these surveys (the latter images being much “cleaner”) and when discussed in this paper, pictures from the second survey will be used as illustrations.
4. *Wardrobe* is a variant of *warderobe*, which has as a synonym *garderobe*, an Old French derived variant used in northeast England. Both terms are of Germanic origin, the Romance **guarda* developing from the early Germanic **ward* and then borrowed back into English around the fourteenth century.
5. Tramlines are the two small parallel lines that precede a headword, used by *OED2* editors when there was a question about the “degree of a word’s ‘Englishness’” (Ogilvie 2008, 29).
6. In the online LAMSAS wardrobe question database, you will find *ein glaide reck*, which appears to be a slight mistranscription. The Pennsylvania Dutch pronunciation of *Kleiderreck* would, however, sound similar to “glaide reck,” since in this variety of German, historically voiced stops are devoiced to some degree (lenis), although they do still contrast with the historically voiceless (fortis) stops. This near-merger could understandably lead to confusion when transcribing from IPA.
7. Transcribers make judgments about other aspects of spelling as well. In LAMSAS we see *clothes press* as two words, while the LAGS transcribers include it as a single orthographic word (following a greater trend toward spelling compounds as one word, e.g., *timeout*). I have kept each as found here.

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