SPECIALITY OR *SPECIALTY*?
A case study on British–American variation

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Anni Suonperä

University of Jyväskylä
Department of Languages
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Anni Suonperä

***SPECIALITY* OR *SPECIALTY*?**
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Brittiläisen ja amerikkalaisen englannin eroja pyritään usein havainnollistamaan yksioikoisilla vastakkainasetteluilla ja erityisesti kaikille tutuilla esimerkkitapauksilla, kuten *autumn* ja *fall* tai *colour* ja *color*. Tällaiset listat esittävät eri varieteetit ja niiden ominaisuudet toisensa poissulkevina, oli kyse sitten leksikaalisesta tai vaikkapa ortografisesta erosta. Nykymaailmassa eri kielimuodot ovat kuitenkin väistämättä yhteyksissä toisiinsa tavalla tai toisella, eikä kielellisiä piirteitä kenties kannata enää erotella näin simplistisesti vain joko brittiläisiin tai amerikkalaisiin. Tutkin kandidaatintyössäni lähisynonyymisiä sanoja *speciality* ja *specialty*, jotka tavataan mieltää esimerkeiksi juuri tästä brittiläis-amerikkalaisesta kontrastista. Tarkastelin kyseisen sanaparin variaatiota ja käyttöä sanakirjojen ja kielioppaiden sekä korpusdatan avulla selvittääkseni, kuinka hyvin perinteinen brittiläis-amerikkalainen jako soveltuu *speciality*n ja *specialty*n kuvaukseen nykykielessä.

Hyödynsin tutkielmassani niin brittiläisiä kuin amerikkalaisia sanakirjoja ja kielioppaita. Kiinnitin huomiota erityisesti siihen, miten kunkin sanan kansallisuuteen oli viitattu – tai joissain tapauksissa jätetty tyystin viittaamatta. Ilmeni, että sekä *speciality*n että *specialty*n kansallisuuden esittämiseen vaikutti ennen kaikkea sanakirjan tai kielioppaan kustantajan oma kielialue. Sanat esiteltiin keskimäärin varsin suoraviivaisesti toistensa brittiläisinä (*speciality*) ja amerikkalaisina (*specialty*) vastineina, vaikkakin kuvaukseen vaikuttivat paikoin hakusana-artikkeleihin liitetyt maininnat kyseisten sanojen käytöistä tietyillä erityisaloilla. Näistä erityisaloista etenkin lääketiede nousi esiin korpusdatan yhteydessä: siinä missä niin brittiläinen kuin amerikkalainenkin korpusdata suurelta osin tuki sanakirjojen käsityksiä kunkin sanan käytöstä, *specialty*n lääketieteellinen käyttö erottui brittiläisestä aineistosta mielenkiintoisena ja myös jokseenkin huomioimattomana poikkeuksena.

Tutkimukseni kohdistui suhteellisen harvinaiseen sanapariin. Aineistoni perusteella jako britannianenglannin *speciality*yn ja amerikanenglannin *specialty*yn vaikutti edelleen perustellulta (joskin sellaisenaan karkealta), mutta alueellisen variaation tutkimukselle olisi jatkossakin hyödyllistä vastaavien yksittäistapaustelu tarkastelu ja pinttyneiden ennakkokäsitysten kyseenalaistus.

Asiasanat: variation, distribution, Americanisation, corpus linguistics

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1 Introduction: variations on a lexeme

Differences in British and American vocabulary are commonly considered a rather straight-forward affair. We as language users are easily tempted to affiliate words with simple labels – such as British or American – to help categorise our world. In the same vein, dictionaries and usage guides will inform their readers that the British *queue* for *a fortnight*, whereas Americans *stand in line* for *two weeks*, and that *colour* and *color* are semantically equal alternatives, used by Britons and by Americans respectively. However, today's society allows for virtually no language or dialect to exist in a vacuum unto itself, which may make such broad cultural and linguistic generalisations increasingly unreliable. Might the boundaries between dialects be blurring and, moreover, is British English growing more Americanised?

Diversity is embedded in all of human communication, and within the fields of language and linguistics, that diversity is conventionally referred to as variation. It is the idea that language constantly provides us with options as to how we convey meanings between one another – but what are the principles behind variation, and when does variation become change? I have examined one case of interdialectal variation – that of two near-synonymous nouns, *speciality* and *specialty* – to shed light on the contemporary relationship between the British and the American lexicon, to whatever extent the variant pair in question accommodates such inferences. This entails the dissection of dictionary and usage guide entries from both British and American sources, as well as the analysis of corpus data to see if the usage of each form is consistent with the way they are described by lexicographers.

There was considerable consensus among the dictionaries and usage guides on the common semantic ground shared by the two forms, but also some notable discrepancies in relation to nationality and subject field divides, or their representations. In fact, the entries for *speciality* and *specialty* in virtually every dictionary and usage manual consulted appeared to be more or less influenced by the national bias of the publisher. Nonetheless, those entries provided ample footing for a comparison with corpus data, which, all in all, betrayed relatively little confusion on the part of actual language users as to the usage of each form. General trends emerged expectedly, while some intriguing anomalies left room for further investigation.

Given the rather small number of recorded occurrences, and the rarity of the two words in language overall, some reservations should be maintained when it comes to all-encompassing conclusions. However, the underlying phenomena of variation and change between the British and American varieties can only benefit from the review of seemingly

minor cases alongside the more inflammatory, sweeping concerns. Even a pair such as *speciality* and *specialty* can serve to illustrate the bigger picture.

2 Background: from variety to variation

Historically, colonialism and migration have been the typical incentives for a language spoken by a given population to be altered by that of another (Sankoff 2004: 642). Invaders and other newcomers will usually import their linguistic ways along with everything else, with the language of all sides in one way or the other being transformed as a result. There are a few possible outcomes: foreign elements may be adopted, they can be rejected or they may even amalgamate with original, local elements (Britain 2004: 618). Be that as it may, the collision of two speech communities produces variation, and while said collision need not be as dramatic as an imperialist conquest, the implications of the change and variation generated can be significant and allow for multifaceted, considered investigation.

Indeed, in today's world cultures have plenty of other ways to interact besides through military triumph or diaspora: the rapid development of information technology enables cross-cultural communication, globalised economy encourages it. Western civilisation provides infinite opportunity for language contact. In this regard, English, the lingua franca of our time, is without a doubt the foremost linguistic liaison, and for a long time Britain, as the birthplace of English, was the leading cultural (Pyles and Algeo 1982: 213), political and economic authority in the world, all of which served to accumulate the prestige of British English (Foster 1968: 18). However, in part due to its wide spread, English itself has fragmented into multiple varieties. Thus, it is presently a reasonable suggestion that 'the English language' in fact comprises several Englishes that, not unlike distinct languages, influence one another in complex ways. Moreover, those processes of influence do not hinge on the more and more obsolete sentiment of British prestige – but, since the latter half of the twentieth century, are increasingly informed by the growing American prestige (Foster 1968: 18).

The patterns by which varieties interact is not dissimilar to what happens when distinct languages meet (Trudgill 2004: 601). Therefore, prestige remains a pivotal concern to studies on variation. It is of particular consequence that prestige is a relative concept: for an entity to possess prestige, others must by definition have less of it. In other words, on any given occasion with the potential for variation, the realisation would be affected by the speaker's perception of the hierarchy between different variants. Naturally, prestige does not

explain all aspects of linguistic choice: beyond cultural and political variables (Sankoff 2004: 640), the individual's choice is also affected by eg. the requirements of the speech situation, the individual's speech motives and interpersonal factors (Biber et al. 2002: 7), as well as wide-ranging social variables, eg. age, gender and social class. Variationist sociolinguistics is based on the notion that all of this correlates with and factors into numerous aspects of the linguistic product.

Without the concept of variation, there is no investigation of language use. As Biber et al. (2002: 7) point out, this is exactly what usage is: diversity in how speakers use language to convey identical ideas, be it through their phonetic, morphological, lexical or grammatical choices. At times that variation manifests itself in a broad and well-known manner, such as in the use of a regional accent, but other times it may be as fine a difference as that of a single letter, as in the variation of *speciality* and *specialty*.

2.1 Americanisation of English

Already in 1964, Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (p. 293) noted that while British English was still a commonplace choice for second language learners of English, the American variety was gaining on it fast, even to the point of overtaking it in some cases. However, with this shift in global cultural status, came a change in not just whose English was taught to foreigners, but in how each variety related towards the other: roughly put, British English was becoming increasingly Americanised (Pyles and Algeo 1993: 217).

As one might imagine, the transference of linguistic power was no over-night feat. In fact, the tide began to turn in the course of the 1800s, as Pyles and Algeo (1993: 217) point out, long before the American broadcasting industry made its native variant of English ubiquitous across the world. They go on to cite Sir William Craigie (1927: 208):

> for some two centuries . . . the passage of new words or senses across the Atlantic was regularly westwards . . . with the nineteenth century . . . the contrary current begins to set in, bearing with it many a piece of drift-wood to the shores of Britain, there to be picked up and incorporated in the structure of the language.

This Americanisation has established a new dynamic in how the varieties interact. For American English, the Britons have long since ceased to be the main point of reference, with cross-Atlantic influences not being much of an issue in contemporary language. For British English, the influence is much more conspicuous: Craigie's now decades-old examples of

Americanisms used by the British already included words such as *backwoods*, *blizzard* and *swamp*. Since then, the spread of American culture has only sped the process up, whereby Britons have come to speak of *cafeteria*s, *cocktail*s and *radio*, as well as *TV* (instead of 'telly'), *highbrow*, *OK*, *breakdown* (as in 'analysis') and *know-how*. (Pyles and Algeo 1993: 217–218)

In effect, circumstances have been born where there is opportunity for interdialectal variation – simply, there are instances where people use a different form than they would likely have used some generations ago, whether or not they are conscious of its being American. Indeed, whereas the general public tends to cringe at the notorious Americanisms, which they often are quick to associate with slang, they will quite happily yet unknowing of their origin use phrases which are just as American (Foster 1968: 19, 71; Pyles and Algeo 1993: 218) and, moreover, in no way lowbrow, such as *law-abiding* and *to demoralize* (Pyles 1952: 217). At the same time, there of course remain significant areas of language in whose variation nationality does not play a role, much less a primary one.

However, of much greater interest are those linguistic features which are ambiguous in terms of national bias in usage: neither regionally neutral from the start, nor Americanised through the introduction of an American invention, for which there naturally could not have existed a word prior to its coinage and subsequent implementation in Britain. Rather, they are features that are routinely assigned a nationality label; of being 'British' or 'American', but that do not necessarily adhere to those labels in practice. Such distinctions may have been well justified in the past, and might certainly remain so. However, here lies a potential for fallacy: what guarantees us that the Transatlantic divide still holds true as a linguistic boundary? Or might the past few decades have seen the trenches shift along the line? At the very least, the long-standing categorical judgments invite investigation and demand empirical evidence to back them up.

Speciality and *specialty* are a near-synonymous pair that is sporadically featured in contrasting representations – or parallel lists – of British and American lexical variation. Never having been known for its contentiousness nor for a salience in language in general, the pair is easily deemed irrelevant in terms of variation within varieties. Conventional wisdom suggests that *speciality* is used in British English, and *specialty* in American English. Such intuition should not be dismissed, but given the strong presence of the American variety in Britain, the possibility exists of variation within a speech community.

2.2 Perceptions and descriptions of British–American variation

A layman would probably envisage the features of British and American English to be divisible into three simple and distinct categories: forms that are recognised and employed in both regions (a kind of neutral class), and forms that are restricted to one of the regions, the British Isles or the United States. One popular method of illustrating these differences between varieties has been the parallel list, whereby, very simply, the page is divided into two columns of mutually corresponding forms from the varieties being contrasted. The forms may be lexical, phonological, morphological or grammatical items, depending on the aspect of language (and differences therein) one wishes to emphasise in one's examination.

However, given the ever forceful mixing of cultures, together with the strong presence of American English, one cannot help but question the validity of such clear-cut divisions. It could be put forth that the very foundation of the parallel list is rendered untenable by globalisation, at any rate if claims of definitiveness are entertained. This is actually an easy enough inference, as the lists are based on strict contrast, on an inherently simplistic dichotomy of 'A versus B', which assigns each variety their proper form while excluding the other. Thus, *mad* is supposed to be irrevocably American, and *angry* equally irrevocably British, when in fact both words are present in both varieties, but with different usage contexts (Pyles and Algeo 1993: 215–216). This is the problem with parallel lists. Granted, they are *designed* to describe the variation in broad terms, which, in itself, is fine as long as that reality is properly acknowledged. However, the fact remains that if used as instructional tools, eg. in language teaching, they run the risk of presenting an inaccurate picture of language. That is the paradox of the parallel list – it presumes interdialectal variation, but glosses over *intra*dialectal variation.

Algeo has proposed a much more complex description of British–American lexical variation that is more appreciative of all the intricacies involved. His typology addresses (1989: 221) the fact that the connections between dialects are based on "partial overlapping, mutually influencing, and occasionally even simple and direct equivalences" (and he thus evidently wishes to distance himself from the more or less deliberate definitiveness of parallel lists). This can be factored into the exploration of *speciality* and *specialty*, for even if their usage does not radically differ from their British–American designations, it most certainly is not absolute, either.

Algeo's typology deals with both referents and the forms used to denote them; similarity of forms combined with dissimilarity of referents constitute polysemy or

homonymy, whereas similarity of referents and dissimilarity of forms constitute synonymy or analogy. (Algeo 1989: 221, 222) Most of this terminology will be of use when dealing with *speciality* and *specialty*, since their variation is not a prototypical example of any of the categories, but benefits from the incorporation of several classifications. This, on the other hand, will be conducive to a comprehensive understanding of the variation.

One way of considering the pair is to label it a case of “multiple forms and single referent” (ibid. 231–233). Under that heading, one could consider first the ‘Equivalent terms’ category, or interdialectal synonymy. This entails forms that refer to a common entity (‘general referent’), and at least one of those forms is used only in one dialect. For instance, *mailman* and *postman* have a common referent, but *mailman* is only used in the United States, whereas *postman* is ‘partially limited’, in that it is customarily British but occasionally used by Americans as well. Similarly, *speciality* is the British form and *specialty* American, but the latter has select uses in British English.

Another option is to regard the words as ‘Overlapping terms’. This supposes that while *speciality* is specifically British, *specialty* could not be called American, but ‘general’. A typical instance of overlapping terms would be *fall* and *autumn*, where the former is American (even though it has in fact been used before by the British and since then abandoned [ibid. 232]) and the latter is a general form, belonging to both varieties equally.

However, one should note that *speciality* and *specialty* are *near*-synonyms, ie. they have a slightly (but significantly) different set of referents and connotations. In addition, seeing as the two forms are only separated by one letter and are thus relatively similar in form, one might also look into polysemous connections (ibid. 233–235). Here, *speciality* and *specialty* might qualify for Algeo’s category of “More/less inclusive terms”, where two words share some senses but differ on others, such as *staff* and *employees*, both of which are used in British as well as American English, but with referent sets of disparate ranges.

2.3 *Speciality* versus *specialty*

There is a certain rare appeal to the variation of *speciality* and *specialty* in particular that derives from its relative singularity. In other words, the variation falls somewhat short of any easy labels, but also of notoriety. While by no means infrequent enough as to be obscure to the point of ambiguity (the combined frequency of *speciality* and *specialty* is 10.49 per one million words in the written part of the British National Corpus; 17.7 in the written part of the

Corpus of Contemporary American English), the words have a limited range of applications. The presence of either form in language is hardly overwhelming in terms of frequency, and might be mostly restricted to rather specific discourses. This renders their variation relatively unobtrusive, some might say irrelevant in terms of overall linguistic developments, not to mention everyday usage by speakers. However, the very fact that *speciality* and *specialty* may not garner much attention or zeal makes them ripe ground for observing the less obvious ways in which two prominent varieties of English, British and American, might be influencing one another. Furthermore, the said 'easy labels' are not completely alien to *speciality* and *specialty*, but thankfully are of use in describing even such a peripheral case, even if only by way of illuminating its peculiarity.

2.3.1 The pair in terms of lexical variation

Within linguistic variation, one piece of the taxonomy into which *speciality* and *specialty* fit rather awkwardly is lexical variation, which entails oft-cited contrasting pairs such as *flat* and *apartment*, or *lorry* and *truck*, or *fortnight* and *two weeks*. Separating these three examples from *speciality* and *specialty* is, for one, their renown specifically as illustrations of the British–American linguistic divide. Any native speaker of British or American English will be able to correctly identify each form (perhaps with the exception of *fortnight*, with which young Britons already struggle [Pyles and Algeo 1993: 218]) as representative of its respective variety, British or American. But not only are they well-known, they are also otherwise distinctive from one another: They are morphologically, etymologically and (perhaps most importantly) phonetically unrelated, and therefore conspicuous in both written and spoken texts, provided the recipient is also familiar with the distinction. This makes them noticeable and recognisable for regular language users, which gives them occasion to choose with discretion, to act on their knowledge consciously. *Speciality* and *specialty*, in contrast, are highly alike in a number of linguistic respects. Moreover, *speciality* and *specialty* do not correspond semantically in as seamless a manner as, for instance, *fortnight* and *two weeks*. The case of *speciality* versus *specialty* may lack the easy contrastiveness, but the fact remains that they clearly are two separate, independent forms.

2.3.2 The pair in terms of orthographical variation

Another angle into variation which *speciality* and *specialty* accommodate in a less than prototypical fashion is orthographical, or spelling, variation. With this category also, famous examples tend to be cited to demonstrate a discontinuity between the British and the American, such as *col**ou**r* vs. *col**o**r*, or *theat**re*** vs. *theat**er***, or *organ**ise*** vs. *organ**ize***. Although initially *speciality* and *specialty* might seem to agree with this assemblage comfortably, there is a notable disparity: In instances such as *col**ou**r* and *col**o**r*, the difference in spelling does not denote a difference in pronunciation. *Speciality* and *specialty*, however, are pronounced in very different ways: the former, /ˌspɛʃɪˈælɪtɪ/, with the stress on the third syllable of a total of five – and the latter, /ˈspɛʃəltɪ/, where the stress is placed on the first syllable of three (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989 s.v.v. *speciality*, *specialty*). Additionally, *speciality* and *specialty* are not part of a widely spread and examined orthographical trend, which *ou~o*, *re~er* and *ise~ize* most certainly are. Other words with similar suffixes, eg. *loyalty*, *mortality* and *originality*, do not have such variation, not on a global level, but not on a local level either; thus, there can hardly be any particular predilection for British English towards -*(a)lity* suffixes, for example, and no grounds for American English to prefer -*lty*.

That is not to say that *speciality* and *specialty* are a completely unequalled phenomenon in language: one example of similarly nonconformist variation is *aluminium* (in Britain) and *aluminum* (in America), separated by one letter but markedly different in pronunciation, in fact analogous with *speciality* and *specialty* in terms of a disparate syllable count as well. Another example are *moustache* and *mustache*, where the stress shifts in a similar fashion from the second syllable in British to the first syllable in American. However, this hardly distinguishes the variant forms in question as a very unified trend, certainly not something that would be immediately acknowledged as indicative of any national bias. This, again, raises the question of recognisability. While *speciality* and *specialty* have their share of differences, they are similar enough to be easily overlooked.

2.3.3 Usage and distribution

In order to understand the patterns behind variation such as that of *speciality* and *specialty*, one needs to pay heed to a range of intricate concerns. What role does nationality play in their usage? (And, for that matter, to what extent would a regular language user be bothered with

that distinction either way?) Beyond awareness of a form being British or American, how is each form represented across different contexts, genres and speakers?

An individual linguistic feature may appear too incidental an angle into the examination of two varieties, and wider implications may strike one as a far-fetched suggestion on the basis of the most minute of details. Indeed, besides a linguist's unabashed fascination with the variation of a single feature, exactly what does our common understanding of language stand to gain from poring over such seeming trivialities?

How and why speakers of one variety choose to borrow a feature from another can be construed to reflect broader cultural developments, perhaps even more so when the feature in question is not necessarily observed as a herald of the 'invading' culture. Lack of an overt nationality reduces the potency of the prestige to be gained and projected by the use of either variant, but it also opens the door for scrutiny of an evolvement that predates public consensus. That evolvement is a legitimate phenomenon if only for the sheer fact that the two forms co-exist *and* vary in usage – and if one assumes a degree of intent behind all linguistic choice, then one also assumes that whatever variant a speaker chooses, it bears significance beyond its individual form and context. That choice is an intertextual act, something that can ultimately be traced back to perceptions systematically associated with each variant, such as those of slangyness or prestige.

Those patterns can be deciphered by looking into the distribution of the variants. Traditional British–American word lists presuppose a clear-cut dichotomy where overlapping goes unaccounted for – a kind of complementary distribution of variants (cf. eg. phonetic variation; Bybee 2001: 213). Seeing as the reliability of those lists has already been contradicted on previous occasions, the case of *speciality* and *specialty* may be similarly opened up. Further, when questioning the validity of categorical parallel lists, one should also propose alternative explanations, namely ones that account for the potential grey areas of usage. For one, instead of mutual exclusion, one allows for the possibility of overlap through contrastive distribution or free variation – the former suggests difference in meaning, the latter complete substitutability. In place of the notion that words by rule rather than exception hold an exclusive allegiance with a particular nation, one embraces a hypothesis (Algeo 1989: 224) of a progression from neutral words that are used across varieties to words that are characteristic of a particular region and restricted to that area. In the following sections I will examine whether *speciality~specialty* has shifted its place along such a continuum. The evidence from dictionaries and usage guides, but especially from corpora, should give

indication as to whether the way in which *speciality* and *specialty* occur in authentic language corresponds with the conventional wisdom and intuition of lexicographers and linguists.

3 Conventional wisdom: dictionaries and usage guides

Any investigation into words, whether it concerns their meaning or usage (if such distinction is a reasonable one to make in the first place), benefits from consulting a dictionary. Admittedly, intuition can also offer valuable points of view on the content and connotations of a word or on what constitutes correct or incorrect usage, but the sheer bulk of tradition and research behind a dictionary grant it a gravitas that one linguist's personal insight inevitably lacks. A kind of inventory of a lexicon, or the vocabulary of a language, a dictionary represents probably the closest thing we have to an official authority on individual words, and lexical items ie. content words in particular (Halliday 2004: 3).

For a deeper understanding of the pragmatic meaning of words in particular, usage guides offer another valid point of view. Their approach to language is problem-centric, in that instead of accounting for 'all' words in English, they advise the reader on select issues that they deem troublesome, either by virtue of experience or the educated guess. Specifically, a usage guide deals in helping the reader negotiate "uncertainty, difficulty, or disagreement" in issues of "sounds, spellings, words, and constructions" (*The Oxford Guide to English Usage* 1983: ix). However, a usage guide may (and usually will) adopt an even stricter, prescriptive approach, whereby it in effect assigns labels of correctness. This hardly serves to make usage guides any less conservative than dictionaries: on the contrary, it makes them even more liable to error, and a fascinating subject for review.

In relation to both dictionaries and usage guides, I shall first present an overview of their respective entries for *speciality* and *specialty*, and then analyse in particular the way in which the potential nationality of each form is presented – if it is presented in the first place. At this conjuncture I will also allude to possible references of special subject fields of either form. Information on regional markedness and special uses will be the background against which corpus-data will be compared.

3.1 Dictionaries

For the purposes of my study, I chose four dictionaries which to examine. In the field of monolingual lexicology, *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth *OED*) is an undeniable presence, trusted and consulted perhaps more than any other, and my primary source for the British lexicological perspective. I will also look at the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* to see if its presumably different function from the *OED* makes a difference in terms of the representation of *speciality* and *specialty*. The third dictionary that I will consult is the *Random House Dictionary*, which will serve as the American viewpoint, and the fourth, Webster's *International Dictionary*, which should outline – if none of the others do – the standing of the two forms in Englishes of the world without bias towards any particular region.

3.1.1 *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*

The primary definition (or "core sense") given by the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (*COED* 2002) for *speciality* reads: "a pursuit, area of study, or skill to which someone has devoted themselves and in which they are expert", with the subsense "a product for which a person or a region is famous". The second definition is "a branch of medicine or surgery", but with a note that this sense is usually covered by *specialty*. The entry as a whole has a note with regards to region and subject field (ie. "label"), stating "chiefly N. Amer. & Medicine also **specialty**". Thus, the *COED* specifies medicine as a domain of language in which *specialty* is a standard variant in British English, if not expressly the *sole* standard variant. Also, it is notable that while *specialty* is here made out to be markedly North American, *speciality* in its entirety is not indicated to carry any regional burden, British or otherwise.

The entry for *specialty* consists similarly of two main senses. The first simply reads "another term for **SPECIALITY**", with a note of the form being used in "chiefly N. Amer. & Medicine" contexts. The second sense, with the subject label Law, reads "a contract under seal", making it the one sense that the *COED* assigns solely to *specialty* even in British English – not that any mention of Britishness is made here, either.

Interestingly, other than giving a much more extensive and detailed account of the senses and uses of each word (and the subtle but apparently existent differences therein), the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED* 1989) does not make the nationality labels of *speciality* and *specialty* any more explicit or precise than the *COED* (2002). On the contrary, in the *OED*,

nationality labels are absent from the description of both entries except for a pair of senses where *specialty* is cited as the North American equivalent to the implied standard forms, of *speciality* (which notably remains geographically unlabelled, even when the corresponding forms of *specialty* are specified as "*N. Amer.*"; see Appendix 1 for both entries).

This is the only point at which the *OED* alludes to any geographical, complementary distribution. The reason why the *OED* specifies two peripheral senses of *specialty* as American while failing to make any note of any form or sense being British is not entirely clear, not when the *OED* does not hold an outspoken allegiance with the British variety. This rather agrees with Algeo's evaluation (1997: 305–306) that the *OED* holds British English in higher regard than other varieties and that this manifests itself through the omission of nationality labels when the variant is theirs, ie. British.

3.1.2 The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*

The *Random House Dictionary* (*RHD* 1981) is very clearly representative specifically of American English, which, given that Random House is based in New York, is hardly surprising. The entry for *speciality* only consists of a cross-reference, stating that *speciality* is the "*chiefly Brit.*" equivalent of *specialty*. The entry for *specialty* is an extensive inventory of a wide range of definitions, without a single nationality label – not in the peripheral senses that the *OED* (1989) cited as North American equivalents to a supposedly more neutral *speciality*, nor is there any mention of the field of medicine, which the *OED* designated as a possible venue for the use of *specialty*. If the *RHD* recognises national differences in individual senses and subject fields, no indication is given towards that direction. Thus, the *RHD* regards the distribution as a decidedly uncontroversial matter.

3.1.3 *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*

This dictionary has thorough and rather evenly balanced entries on both *speciality* and *specialty*, with cross-references that point out equivalences between the referents of the two forms. No nationality labels are attached to either form, which is probably the result of the international 'bias' of the dictionary. Within the entry for *specialty*, the legal denotation of a particular type of contract is mentioned – there is, however, no mention of a particular use in the field of medicine.

Considering that all the other three dictionaries make at least some mention of nationality in regards to *speciality* and *specialty*, it is to be taken as a significant statement that *Webster* (*WID* 1976) refrains from any such remarks. Whether or not this supposed impartiality is actually useful to the reader, however, is not entirely positive. If the polar opposites of the scale of possible lexicographical descriptions are ‘wildly generalised but practical’ on the other end, and ‘impartial to the point of misinformation’ on the other, which is the worse ethos to pursue? If nationality or subject field differences exist, they should be disclosed, but not at the expense of accuracy. As Table 1 shows, the representations of the two words in each of the four dictionaries were different to the next. The only consistent category seems to have been that with the references to the legal sense, and beyond that the entries appear to have been influenced by the respective bias of the dictionary in question.

Table 1. References to region or subject field
in the dictionary entries of ***speciality*** or ***specialty***.

	OED	*COED*	*RHD*	*WID*
British	–	–	+	–
(North) American	+	+	–	–
law, legal	+	+	+	+
medicine	–	+	–	– *

* No special mention of ‘medicine’ is made, but the entry
mentions a sense of ‘a branch of science in which one specialises’

3.2 Usage guides

For the perhaps more emphatically prescriptive point of view, I turn to usage guides. My sources will be the *Cambridge Guide to English Usage* (henceforth *Cambridge Guide*), a self-proclaimed highlighter of diversity in English (2004: vii) and the influential and prestigious *Fowler’s Modern English Usage* (henceforth *Fowler*).

The *Cambridge Guide* (2004: s.v. *specialty or speciality*) expressly articulates its stance on the relationship between the two forms. Both *speciality* and *specialty* are given an identical, two-piece set of meanings, “special product” and “special pursuit”. Crucially, on the grounds of corpus data, the *Cambridge Guide* presents strong national usage tendencies: *specialty* is virtually always the choice of Americans, while *speciality* is chosen by the British more than 3 times out of 4. At first, the description appears neat and efficient, but upon

further inspection, some problems arise: what about the subject fields of eg. law and medicine, neither of which are mentioned in the *Cambridge* entry? Is it not possibly misleading to suggest such lack of heterogeneity in the use of the two words across subject fields, when most other dictionaries and usage guides do in fact recognise an exception in how the forms vary in contexts of law and medicine, in particular? Thus, if only general contexts were included (ie. if legal and medical texts were excluded), might the share of *speciality* be significantly more than the one given here, 75 percent?

Fowler's description (1996: s.v. *speciality, specialty*), on the other hand, defines (actually citing the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, ie. *COD*, as its source) the two main senses for *speciality* as "special pursuit, product, operation, etc." and "special feature, characteristic, or skill". *Specialty* is described as a transposable form for both meanings, in North America in particular, and additionally, the meaning specific to the field of law ("sealed contract") is pointed out. On the whole, the Oxfordian partiality for British English is apparent from this entry, whereby the more British form is the stem from which exceptions have strayed.

4 Corpus linguistics

Corpora are a highly useful tool in investigating lexical variation, and, presumably, a practical counterpoint to the dictionaries and usage guides discussed previously. A corpus is a database consisting of authentic language as it has been used in real-life context. Critically to its raison d'être, it is not artificially generated or deliberately elicited for the purposes of a given study (Biber et al. 1994: 169–170), but obtained from published sources or transcribed from spoken samples after the fact. Thus, as Biber at al. (1998: 21) point out, they give insight to not only the application of the word in context, but to its frequency in use.

For empirical evidence on the usage and variation of *speciality* and *specialty* in British and American contexts, I collected data from two corpora: for British usage, the British National Corpus (BNC), and for the American data, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Of the two, the BNC in particular lends itself to the examination of non-linguistic factors, ie. the characteristics of the text and its producer. I will look at how each of the forms in question is represented in terms of a number of variables. I will address the COCA first, as I expect its data to manifest little to no variation, and then compare the results with the data from the BNC.

When using corpora, one must remember that their functioning hinges ultimately on how representative they are. A corpus is only as accurate a depiction of language as the texts chosen for it allow it to be. Therefore, matters of representation should be taken into account and the data be interpreted critically in order for the results not to be veered away from authentic language.

4.1 The Corpus of Contemporary American English

The COCA is a collection of American English from 1990 to the present day, amounting to approximately 385 million words in 150,000 texts. The texts are divided into five sections of roughly equal size: spoken, fiction, popular magazine, newspaper and academic. Seeing as my data from the BNC will not include data on spoken texts (see 4.2), I will not examine it from the COCA either. (Davies)

The data in COCA is relatively straight-forward. As Table 2 below indicates, the word *speciality* and all its forms (nominative, possessive, plural and combinations thereof) occur 181 times – in a total of ca. 308 million words that the written part of the corpus comprises, the number is minuscule. When *specialty*, on the other hand, is found 5281 times, the ratio in favour of the latter form is ca. 322 : 1.

Table 2. ***Speciality*** and ***specialty*** in the COCA, written.

Lemma	No. of hits	Percentage of hits	Frequency per million words*
speciality	181	**0.3**	0.6
specialty	5281	**96.7**	17.1
Total	5462	100	17.7

* ‘Frequency’ will henceforth refer to ‘frequency per million words’

4.1.1 Diachronic comparison of *speciality* and *specialty* (1990–2008)

The picture is hardly altered by the incorporation of the diachronic perspective, as seen in Table 3. If anything, it shows a further lessening in the use of *speciality*, from 122 between 1990 and 1999, to 59 between 2000 and 2008 – though with such few occurrences, 181, across the 19 year period, deductions are not necessarily conclusive. With *specialty*, however, the numbers can be relied upon with less caution: with 5281 occurrences spread rather equally

across the 19 years (54.5 percent, or 2879 hits, on the first half, 45.5 percent, or 2402 hits, on the second), they can be taken to reliably represent the usage of the shorter form in American discourse. As for changes *between* the usage of the two forms, the infrequency of *speciality* renders the data, if not unworkable, at least a little suspect. What is evident, however, is the sheer dominance of *specialty* through the two time periods, with a percentage of all occurrences of either form at over 95 percent throughout.

Table 3. Diachronic comparison of ***speciality*** and ***specialty*** in the COCA, written.

	speciality			*specialty*		
Publication	No. of hits	% of hits	Frequency	No. of hits	% of hits	Frequency
1990–1999	122	**4.1**	0.4	2879	**95.9**	9.3
2000–2008	59	**2.4**	0.2	2402	**97.6**	7.8
Total	181	**3.3**	0.6	5281	**96.7**	17.1

4.1.2 Genre comparison of *speciality* and *specialty*

The COCA features four genres of written text: fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and academic journals. Among them, both *speciality* and *specialty* are found most frequently in newspaper texts (Table 4), where their occurrence percentages, 4.0 and 96.0, rather closely match the total percentages of 3.3 and 96.7. The genres farthest from that average in terms of occurrence ratio are fiction where there are relatively the most hits for *speciality* (5.5 percent), and popular magazines with the least (1.7 percent). One might hypothesise that artistic lisence has encouraged the use of the rarer *speciality* in American fictional texts, whereas other genres favour a more traditional or neutral usage, of *specialty*. However, even in the case of fiction, the usage difference towards other genres is not very substantial, definitely not enough (with 29 hits, and a mere 1.5 percentage unit difference to the next highest ratio holder, ie. newspapers with 4.0 percent) to reflect broader text domain or subject field tendencies of any particular consequence.

Table 4. Genres of the texts with *speciality* or *specialty* in the COCA, written.

	speciality			*specialty*		
Genre	No. of hits	% of hits	Frequency	No. of hits	% of hits	Frequency
Fiction	29	**5.5**	0.39	501	**94.5**	6.69
Popular magazines	30	**1.7**	0.37	1777	**98.3**	22.03
Newspapers	81	**4.0**	1.06	1929	**96.0**	25.27
Academic journals	41	**3.7**	0.54	1074	**96.3**	14.10
Total	181	**3.3**	0.6	5281	**96.7**	17.1

While obviously a comprehensive corpus, the COCA's account of texts from only 1990 onwards inevitably reduces its perspective into language change. For that purpose, the TIME Magazine corpus offers a solution: 100 million words of American English starting from 1923 continuing to the present day. (Davies) However, there is very little to interpret, for *speciality* occurs a mere 20 times (and further, those 20 instances were not included as an independent headword, or lemma, but rather as subordinate to the lemma *specialty*). With *specialty* occuring 1290 times, the ratio is 64.5 : 1 in favour of *specialty*. This makes for a considerably less drastic difference in frequency than the 322 : 1 ratio from COCA between 1990 and 2008, but one hardly dare use a number as low as 20 from which to establish a decreasing trend. All in all, the relationship between *speciality* and *specialty* in American English is decidedly clear-cut and probably rather constant.

4.2 The British National Corpus

Compiled between 1991 and 1994, the BNC is a public corpus that consists of 4,048 texts, or 100 million words. Of that total, approximately 10 percent is made up of spoken and 90 percent of written texts. The oldest samples are from 1960 (which are all imaginative texts; informative texts are included from 1975 onwards), the newest from 1993. (University of Oxford 2005) In my examination of the corpus, I used the BNCweb interface.

Within those 100 million words, *speciality* and *specialty* occur 936 times in 401 separate texts, which makes their overall frequency in the corpus a mere 9.52 per million words. Thus, the representativeness of the BNC in the case of these two particular words is not entirely incontestable, but then again, this is a well anticipated problem in examining infrequent words, regardless of the corpus. Results extracted from the BNC can be taken to indicate regularities in usage to a relevant extent, when interpreted correctly.

While spoken samples make up 10 percent of the corpus, *speciality* and *specialty* were only used 14 times in 12 spoken texts (all 14 of which were forms of *speciality*). Seeing as such a small number could not be considered a statistically valid sample, and since the inclusion of data from spoken texts would detract from the use of other research parametres, I decided to only look at the written part of the BNC.

The BNC does not only include strictly British texts, in that some texts are tagged as being written by other than UK or Ireland residents (both of which are, for the purposes of this study, simply referred to as 'British'). However, as texts by British writers or writers whose domicile is unknown constitute an overwhelming majority – nearly 99 percent – of the texts, and among the 922 hits for *speciality* or *specialty* in the written part of the corpus, only 7 hits were recorded as being other than British or unknown, domicile will not be observed in the BNC data in reference to the two forms henceforth.

4.2.1 General distribution

Table 5. ***Speciality*** and ***specialty*** in the BNC, written.

	No. of hits	% of hits	Texts with hits	% of texts with hits	Frequency
speciality	689	**74.7**	350	**84.7**	7.84
specialty	233	**25.3**	63	**15.3**	2.65
Total	922	100	389 ; 413 *	100 (=413)	10.49

* 389 is the absolute amount of texts; 413 is the sum "texts with *speciality*" + "texts with *specialty*"

Of the total 922 instances of either word in the corpus, 689 are under the lemma *speciality*, and the remaining 233 under *specialty*, which corresponds almost exactly with the 3 : 1 proportion given by the *Cambridge Guide* (Table 5). However, in such a small total of occurrences, the resulting ratio may be heavily influenced by individual texts, and individual speakers and writers, which is why it pays to study also the number of texts and not merely the hits. *Speciality* was used in 350 texts, while *specialty* was found in only 63 texts – this makes for a ratio of approximately 5.6 : 1, considerably less balanced than the ratio of absolute numbers of hits.

At this point, it becomes apparent that some texts feature both forms, not just one or the other. In fact, among the 389 texts, 21 texts have both forms in them – *speciality* is used altogether 58 times in a text that also uses *specialty*, and *specialty* as many as 62 times in such

a "mixed" text. Thus, remarkably, of the whole of the 233 hits for *specialty* in the corpus, 27 percent occur in mixed texts, while the corresponding percentage for *speciality* is only 8. It could, therefore, be hypothesised that across this data, the usage of *specialty* as a sovereign word unto itself is somewhat more wavering than than of *speciality*. Of course there is also the chance of mixed texts using the two forms to denote two separate meanings – which is quite plausible in the 10 of the 21 mixed texts that deal with issues related to law and medicine, where *specialty* could be used in one of the field-specific senses indicated in eg. the *COED* (2002: s.v. *speciality*, *specialty*) – but the remaining 11 texts seem to employ the two variants interchangeably, with no difference in meaning.

4.2.2 Diachronic comparison of *speciality* and *specialty* (1960–1993)

Table 6. ***Speciality*** and ***specialty*** in the BNC according to publication date, written.

	speciality				*specialty*			
	No. of hits	Texts with hits	% of texts with hits	Freq.	No. of hits	Texts with hits	% of texts with hits	Freq.
1960–1974	3	2	**66.7**	1.75	1	1	**33.3**	0.58
1975–1984	27	16	**66.7**	5.84	72	8	**33.3**	15.57
1985–1993	649	325	**85.8**	8.14	160	54	**14.2**	2.01
Total	679	343*	**84.5**	7.89	233	63	**15.5**	2.71

* Of the 350 texts with hits for *speciality*, 7 texts do not have a known publication date

The statistics based on date of publication, in particular, demonstrate in Table 6 why it can be misleading to just examine the amount of hits for a given word: if one, for instance, were to look at the frequency per million words of each form in 1975–1984, one might come to believe that during that time, *specialty* (with 5.84) was preferred to *speciality* (with 15.57) in a ratio of approximately 2.7 : 1. However, these numbers are obviously vastly influenced by a small number of individual texts, seeing as the 72 occurrences of *specialty* during that time are from a mere 8 texts.

Underlying this inconclusiveness is the simple fact that the focus of the BNC is on synchronic aspects of language, which is all the more obvious with relatively rare words.

Accordingly, the two earlier periods of time are here represented by a small number of texts: among the 2,978 texts whose publication date is known, 46 texts (with ca. 1.7 million words) are from 1960–1974, and 155 texts (with ca. 4.6 million words) from 1975–1984. Compared with the 79.7 million words in 2,777 texts from 1985–1993, it is no wonder that such rare words do not easily accommodate diachronic examination.

Compared with the overall *speciality* to *specialty* ratio of 5.6 : 1 (texts with matches), the ratio for the latest time period, 1985–1993 with ca. 6.0 : 1, does not point to any radical development. If nothing else, it is a reasonable enough supposition that at least *specialty* has not fundamentally gained on *speciality* in British usage. This data does not offer evidence for a shift along the continuum, much less an all-out Americanisation. The data does, however, predate the internet age, whose inclusion might have lead to some very different results.

4.2.3 Textual features in comparing *speciality* and *specialty*

The following tables demonstrate genre and text domain differences in the usage of each form. I will also mention the perceived level of difficulty of the texts as a telling variable. Social variables, on the other hand, did not seem to play a major part in the BNC data on *speciality* and *specialty*. The situation might be different if the corpus included information on eg. social class or education of either the author or audience, but as it is, the sex and age of the author are factors were available for consideration.

Information on the sex of the author is only sporadically available in the BNC, and together with the fact that gender representation is quite unequal in the corpus as a whole, statistics in this case do not offer consequential results. Age is rather similarly a less than informative category – for instance, in the case of *specialty*, only 9 texts are tagged with information on the age of the author. The same number for *speciality* is 66. Thus, conclusions based on that data would be hypothetical at best, and should be left to future research (see Appendix 2 for the BNC data on age of author).

4.2.3.1 *Speciality*: genre and domain

In the case of *speciality*, there arises a peculiar trend in terms of the genres in which the form is used (Table 7). With a staggering frequency of ca. 193 in a million words, advertisement texts are the prominent type of text. The reason for this becomes clearer when one looks at the

subject matters, or domains, which those texts deal with (Table 8). By and large, those advertisement texts tagged with ‘leisure’ refer to tourism brochures, whereas the ones with ‘commerce, finance’ deal with products or services. However, overriding any quick judgment that advertisers unequivocally prefer *speciality* is the weighty fact that of the 107 hits (as seen in Table 7), 85 come from one single text. Thus, while *speciality* could indeed be a popular choice among the advertisement industry, this data does little to prove it, at least not to a greater extent than with any other field.

Table 7. A sampling of the most significant occurrences in the BNC in terms of genre; ***speciality***.

Genre	No. of hits	Texts with hits	Frequency
print advertisement	107	14	193.27
natural science; non-academic	49	14	19.34
miscellaneous	152	60	16.46

Table 8. A sampling of the most significant occurrences in the BNC in terms of text domain; ***speciality***.

Domain	No. of hits	Texts with hits	Frequency
Leisure	256	80	21
Commerce, finance	100	49	13.62
Natural, pure sciences	44	11	11.52
Arts	44	37	6.69
Social science	77	41	5.49

4.2.3.2 *Specialty*: genre and domain

Specialty, on the other hand, is concentrated in on medical texts, either academic or non-academic (Table 9), and, accordingly in terms of domain, on natural and pure sciences (Table 10). Thus, the distinction made in dictionaries and usage guides seems to correspond with actual usage very accurately in that subject field, as much as the humble total of texts allows for that kind of inference.

Table 9. A sampling of the most significant occurrences in the BNC in terms of genre; ***specialty***.

Genre	No. of hits	Texts with hits	Frequency
medicine; academic	113	18	78.71
medicine; non-academic	34	4	67.38
social science; non-academic	21	6	5.66

Table 10. A sampling of the most significant occurrences in the BNC in terms of text domain; ***specialty***.

Domain	No. of hits	Texts with hits	Frequency
Natural, pure sciences	112	16	29.33
Social science	58	14	4.14
Commerce, finance	22	10	3
Applied science	20	7	2.79
World affairs	11	6	0.64

However, the subject field of law, which was specified as expressly the arena of *specialty* in all four dictionaries and *Fowler*, is notably absent. In fact, among the 279 academic and non-academic texts on politics, law or education, and the 17 texts with either of the forms, there is a ratio of 7.5 : 1 in favour of *speciality* (or, if one looks at the raw number of hits, 18 : 1). Certainly, 17 texts or 38 hits do not exactly constitute solid evidence against the judgment of those dictionaries. However, while neither of the two occurrences of *specialty* even carry the sense of ‘sealed contract’, among the 36 hits of *speciality*, 4 hits (in 3 texts) denote this meaning.

4.2.3.3 Perceived level of difficulty

In terms of the difficulty of the texts with hits, *speciality* and *specialty* differ rather clearly, as Table 11 demonstrates. Whereas *speciality* is by far most frequent in texts of low difficulty, *specialty* is most represented in texts of high difficulty. This probably derives from the genres and domains which each form is most attached with: *speciality* with its many hits in advertisement presumably aimed at the Average Joe (travel, services, products), *specialty* with medical texts which obviously require particular expertise. Then again, it would only

take a few more texts of eg. low frequency with hits for *specialty* to tilt that ratio (of approximately 9 : 1 in favour of *speciality*) closer to those in texts of medium or high difficulty, seeing as the texts in the 'Low' bracket are only represented by 82 (for *speciality*) and 8 (for *specialty*) texts as it is. Perhaps more than anything else, then, these numbers reiterate the genre and domain information presented in sections 4.2.3.1 and 4.2.3.2, with all the strengths and weaknesses that that data displayed.

Table 11. Perceived level of difficulty of texts with hits for *speciality* or *specialty* in the BNC.

	speciality			*specialty*		
	Hits/texts	% of texts	Frequency	Hits/texts	% of texts	Frequency
Low	229/82	**91.1**	13.51	9/8	**0.9**	0.53
Medium	310/192	**85.7**	6.71	133/32	**14.3**	2.88
High	150/76	**76.8**	6.06	91/23	**23.2**	3.68
Total	689/350	**84.7**	7.84	233/63	**15.3**	2.65

5 Conclusion

The reach of American culture is wider than ever before. How and when the increased American presence, then, translates into Americanised language is an ongoing evolution, and one that is not necessarily cumulative. Languages, like their speakers, do not behave according to the most predictable or straight-forward of patterns, and nor do language change and variation always readily conform to assumptions. That is not to say that patterns do not play a role, just that the more idiosyncratic cases, while seemingly inconsistent with wider trends, actually help to qualify those trends in accurate terms. Thus, exceptions are a relevant aspect of variation.

The near-synonymous noun pair of *speciality* and *specialty* served as a case example in my investigation into British–American lexical variation. The possibility of national usage differences and changes therein provided the incentive, as well as the framework, for my research. In order to discern the prevailing notions on each word and their distribution, I turned to dictionaries and usage guides. They exhibited notable bias in congruence with the nationality of their publisher, but this did not result in any major discrepancies in their view of the variation, per se, but rather in how that variation was represented. All in all, the entries for

speciality and *specialty* were fairly dependable, if somewhat broad, which became apparent on inspection of corpus data.

While my hypothesis of Americanising usage across British contexts did not emerge as a current tendency when it comes to the two words under investigation – not in such clear terms, anyway – synchronous variation proved a rather more auspicious springboard for a comparison. To wit, *specialty* seems to have carved itself a distinctive niche in British English in a select few genres and text domains (cf. section 2.2 for 'Equivalent terms' as in Algeo 1989: 231–233; section 2.3.3 for contrastive distribution), whereas American English near invariably opts for *specialty* regardless of context. However, in light of the proportionate neutrality of each form, there is really no reason to assume that *specialty* could not gain further usage domains in the future, or even applications in language on the whole.

Language is ultimately made up of singular cases, such as my chosen two words. Linguists often favour phenomena that are neatly definable and generalisable; features that ostensibly cover an impressive expanse of language. But just as quantity does not equal quality, it is not merely frequency which should pass for relevance. Accordingly, variation research based even on the most obscure of words or attributes should be stuck by. If for nothing else, then for the sake of variety.

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Appendix 1. *Oxford English Dictionary* entries for *speciality* and *specialty* (except for quotations).

speciality

SECOND EDITION 1989

(spɛʃɪˈælɪtɪ) Also 5 **-itee**, 5-6 **-ite**, 7 **-allitye**. [ad. OF. *especialité* ESPECIALITY (later *specialité*, mod.F. *spécialité*) or late and med.L. *speciālitās*, f. *speciālis* SPECIAL *a.* Cf. It. *spec-*, *spezialità*, Sp. *especialidad*, Pg. *-idade*.]

1. A special, particular, or individual point, matter, or item; freq. *pl.*, particulars, details.

2. a. The quality of being special, limited, or restricted in some respect (occasionally implying particularity of application or treatment. †***in speciality***, in detail. †***but speciality***, without partiality or favour.

†**b.** Technical usage. *Obs.*—[1]

c. ***in speciality***, especially, particularly.

d. *Biol.* Special development or adaptation to surroundings.

3. a. A special or distinctive quality, property, characteristic, or feature; a peculiarity.

b. With *the*: The distinctive quality, etc., *of* a particular thing or class.

4. *Law*. **a.** = SPECIALTY 7.

b. A special warrant; also, the officer charged with executing this.

5. a. A special aptitude, skill, occupation, or line of business.

b. A special subject of study or research; that branch of scholarly, scientific, or professional work in which one is a specialist.

c. A thing or article specially characteristic of, produced or manufactured by, a particular place, business firm, etc. (Cf. SPECIALTY 8 and SPÉCIALITÉ.)

6. a. A thing or article of a special kind, as distinguished from what is usual or common.

b. *attrib.*

7. *Theatr.* Used *attrib.* to designate a performer or performance, esp. in variety entertainments, of an unusual or specialized character.

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(ˈspɛʃəltɪ) Forms: 4-6 **specyalte** (5 **-allte**), 5-6 **specyaltee**, 6 **-alt**(**e**)**y**; 4-5 **specialte**, 5-6 **-tee**, 4-7 **-tie**, 6-7 **-tye**, 6- **specialty** (6 **-allty**); 5 **spetialte**, 7 **specielty**. [ad. OF. (*e*)*specialté*, f. (*e*)*special* SPECIAL *a.*: see -TY, and cf. SPECIALITY and ESPECIALTY.]

I. †1. a. Special affection, attachment, or favour.

†b. ***for*** or ***in specialty***, as a special mark of favour or esteem. *Obs.*

†2. Particularity or detail in description or discussion. Chiefly in phr. ***in specialty***. *Obs.*

3. ***in*** (also ***†by, †of, †with***) ***specialty***, in a special or particular manner or degree.

4. a. Special or particular character or quality; a special feature or characteristic.

b. The quality of being limited or determined by special cases or circumstances.

c. Special knowledge; tendency to specialism.

II. †5. a. A thing specially belonging or attached to one person; a special possession, distinction, favour, or charge. *Obs.*

†b. ***of*** or ***with a specialty***, especially, particularly. *Obs.*

6. a. A special or particular matter, point, or thing.

b. A special or separate proviso or article in an agreement, etc.

7. *Law*. A special contract, obligation, or bond, expressed in an instrument under seal.

8. a. A special line of work or business; a special manufacture or product (characteristic of a certain firm, place, etc.); an article specially dealt in or stocked. (Cf. SPECIALITY 5c.)

b. A special subject of study or research.

9. *N. Amer.* = SPECIALITY 6, 7.

Appendix 2. BNC data on age of author in texts with *speciality* or *specialty*.

Table 12. Age of author in the usage of ***speciality*** in the BNC.

Age	No. of words	No. of hits	Dispersion (over files)	Frequency per million words
60+	5,126,298	35	17/139	6.83
45–59	7,230,584	47	15/205	6.5
35–44	6,726,929	38	25/191	5.65
25–34	2,267,024	11	7/66	4.85
15–24	542,578	2	2/19	3.69
0–14	59,559	0	0/3	0
Total	21,952,972	133	66/623	6.06

Table 13. Age of author in the usage of ***specialty*** in the BNC.

Category	No. of words	No. of hits	Dispersion (over files)	Frequency per million words
35–44	6,726,929	23	5/191	3.42
25–34	2,267,024	2	2/66	0.88
60+	5,126,298	1	1/139	0.2
45–59	7,230,584	1	1/205	0.14
0–14	59,559	0	0/3	0
15–24	542,578	0	0/19	0
Total	21,952,972	27	9/623	1.23