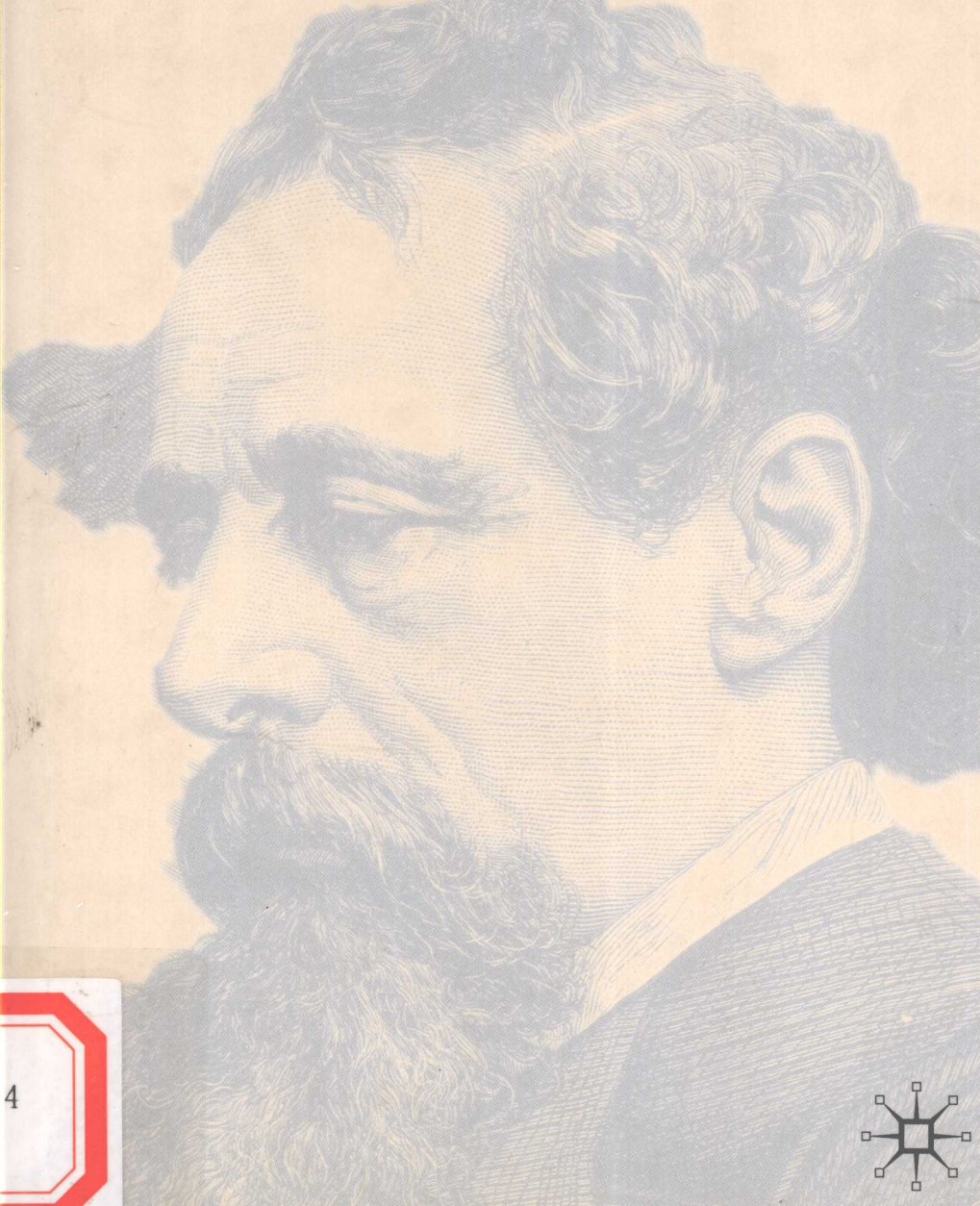
INVESTIGATING DICKENS' STYLE
A COLLOCATIONAL ANALYSIS

Masahiro Hori



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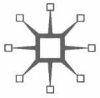

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Foreword

I had the good fortune to host Professor Masahiro Hori in the Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics of the University of Edinburgh during the 2001–2002 academic year, when he was 'breaking the back' of the book you now hold. Our weekly meetings were like a master class in the problems and potentialities of a stylistics grounded in corpus linguistic analysis, with Professor Hori as master and I his intensely interested and mildly combative pupil. The pupil learned a staggering amount. As for the master, he benefited mostly from the discipline of preparing for our weekly meetings, moderately from my insights as a reasonably well-read native speaker of English, and occasionally from a hard question of mine that he had to formulate an answer to. I say 'had to', but the truth is that most scholars have learned to duck really hard questions. Part of my great admiration for Professor Hori is that he never took the easy way out, no matter how much time and effort it took to satisfy his sparring partner.

What I learned over the course of the year, and what readers of this book will learn, falls into three main areas. The first is spelled out in the book's main title, *Investigating Dickens' Style* – though *styles* would have been no less appropriate, since at least two distinct styles are employed in the book which serves as the main study example, *Bleak House*. On the other hand, one might argue that Dickens' genius lies precisely in his ability to merge such distinct stylistic strands into a synthetic whole. Professor Hori has been working on Dickensian stylistics for many years, and has been the person primarily responsible for the marvellous Japanese corpus apparatus that is now at our disposal. So I would have stood to learn a lot about Dickens' style from him even prior to his latest research. But his new findings cranked up the level of excitement all the more.

There have of course been countless attempts to describe the features that make Dickens' prose so immediately recognizable. In the case of *Bleak House*, it has become a 'received idea' that what distinguishes the chapters written as third-person narrative from those written in the first-person voice of Mrs Allan Woodcourt (*née* Esther Hawdon, *alias* Esther Summerson) is the simplicity, candour and naivety of the heroine's account. The evidence cited for this is usually lexical: overt expressions of emotion (always more common in first than in third-person narra-

tive), but also an absence of the verbal creativity and tendency to neologize that Dickens is prone to in his unmediated authorial voice. Yet by examining the language of *Bleak House* not word-by-word or sentence-by-sentence, but as *collocations* – word-groups that form a closely joined unit – Hori shows us how Esther's voice quickly grows in confidence and maturity from the early chapters onwards, so that, for most of the book, her own language is no less original in the way it joins words together than the third-person narrator's is. This insight has enormous potential for shaping new interpretations, not just of *Bleak House*, but of Dickens' entire oeuvre.

The second area in which Hori has made a substantial contribution is in refining a methodology for bringing together corpus data, linguistic analysis and stylistic interpretation. His work addresses a wide range of fundamental questions concerning the nature of linguistic and literary originality and creativity, and how corpus data can be used and misused in assessing a particular author or text in this regard. Even text analysts who have no particular interest in Dickens can learn a great deal from the approach Hori has developed and his explanations of why it has taken this particular shape rather than other conceivable ones. The robustness of his findings adds strongly, in my view, to the overall case for taking the collocation as the basic unit of language analysis, as British linguists and applied linguists have been arguing for more than half a century, with a rapidly increasing number of people taking heed of their arguments in the last decade.

The third area in which Hori's work marks a significant step forward involves what is sometimes referred to as *voice*, though there is wide variation in what that term is taken to mean among those who use it. What I mean by it is the conglomeration of features that makes the output of a particular speaker or writer identifiable as belonging to him or her. Had you asked me in the autumn of 2001 what were the most important such features, I would have pointed to such categories as lexical choice, lexical variety, lexical density, sentence length and intricacy, presence or absence of colloquialism, ellipsis, ambiguity, irony, metaphor and other figurative language, as well as any idiosyncrasies of grammar and syntax. By the spring of 2002 Masahiro Hori had convinced me irrevocably that what gives individual character to a writer's voice is, more than anything else, how he or she combines words, not into propositions or sentences, but into collocations. Something very fundamental is clearly happening at that level. Linguistics has largely neglected it up to now, and a serious shift in the research agenda is needed so that we can understand what it is with greater precision.

This way of looking at texts from the perspective of voice grounded in collocation has already greatly enriched my own teaching and research, and I am certain that it will continue to do so for many years to come. I expect that it will do the same for others as well. It is difficult to imagine how a work in stylistics might make a more profound or a more welcome contribution.

These comments have merely scratched the surface of this book's riches. I have tried to emphasize that, while its appeal to Dickens specialists will be evident, it should in fact be much more widely shared – something I am in a good position to emphasize, not being a Dickens specialist myself. This is not to imply however that Dickens studies on their own do not provide sufficient justification for this book. In fact, I had been much looking forward to sending a copy of this book to my old undergraduate professor of English literature, Herbert Barrows, who convinced me nearly thirty years ago that Dickens is the greatest writer of at least the last 200 years and *Bleak House* the greatest novel in the English language. I know he would have found the book enlightening and stimulating. Sadly, Professor Barrows died in August 2002, just weeks after Professor Hori and I completed our colloquy, during which I often thought of him, recalling how his teaching enriched my youth, every bit as much as Masahiro Hori's wonderful research has enriched my thinking today.

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Acknowledgements

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist, has said, 'If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper.'

Though I am no poet, I can see clearly many faces smiling in every page of this book. Without the aid of several people, this book would not exist. I credit three respected teachers for leading me on my odyssey of English Philology and Stylistics. Hiroyuki Ito introduced me to the study of the language and style of Charles Dickens, and has continued to provide a healthy amount of advice and guidance. At the reading circle under his leadership, Bunshichi Miyauchi first initiated me into the intriguing and profound language and style of Shakespeare. The late Gerald Sullivan stimulated me to become more involved in the study of word stories, and we later co-authored a series of books, *My Word!*, as a result. These three teachers repeatedly encouraged me to publish this present work.

Without Richard Gilbert's professional friendship and laborious editing, this book might not have come to be. As a careful reader of this script he provided invaluable comments and many helpful suggestions. During my one-year sabbatical at the University of Edinburgh I had the opportunity, each Tuesday afternoon, to meet with John Joseph, who listened to my presentations and afforded excellent insights. Norman Macleod, at the same university, also kindly found the time to discuss my ideas and read my papers concerning Dickens' style. Knud Sørensen's opinions regarding my project convinced me of the significance of research into Dickens' language in terms of collocational analysis. Yutaka Tsutsumi contributed to the creation of 'Picking-up Dialogue and Non-dialogue' for this research. Tatsuaki Tomioka patiently read through the draft of this book and provided many helpful comments. Joseph Tomei gave me appropriate advice when I was in trouble.

In addition to those who have directly helped me accomplish this research project, many others have indirectly contributed. Some are senior professors and friends at my alma mater who have looked forward to the publication of this book, but more, provided relaxation with their good humour and bonhomie: Shoshichiro Adachi, Michitaka Iki, Yoshinori Watanabe, Takashi Kaijima, Sadahiro Kumamoto, Shiro

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M. H.

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Abbreviations

COBUILD	*COBUILD English Collocations on CD-ROM* (1995) London: Harper Collins Publishers.
COD	*Concise Oxford English Dictionary of Current English* (1995).
ECF	*Eighteenth-Century Fiction on CD-ROM* (1996). This database comprises the works of 30 of the most influential writers of the British Isles in the eighteenth century. It contains 77 collected works or 96 discrete items.
EP	Eric Partridge's *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (8th edn, 1983).
LGSWE	*Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999).
NCF	*Nineteenth-Century Fiction on CD-ROM* (2000). This database contains 250 complete works of prose fiction by 109 authors from the period 1781 to 1901.
NCFWD	A nineteenth-century corpus of fiction (approximately 2.2 million words) excluding Dickens' texts.
OED	*The Oxford English Dictionary* and its Supplement.
OED2	*The Oxford English Dictionary on Compact Disc, 2nd edn, Macintosh Version* (1993).
(OMF II, 5)	This means (*Our Mutual Friend* Book the Second, Chapter 5).

The following is a list of the texts compiled in the Dickens Corpus:

SB	*Sketches by Boz* (1833–36)
PP	*The Pickwick Papers* (1836–37)
OT	*Oliver Twist* (1837–39)
NN	*Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–39)
OCS	*The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41)
BR	*Barnaby Rudge* (1841)
AN	*American Notes* (1842)
MC	*Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–44)
CC	*A Christmas Carol* (1843)
Chimes	*The Chimes* (1844)
CH	*The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845)
BL	*The Battle of Life* (1846)
HM	*The Haunted Man* (1848)

DS	*Dombey and Son* (1846–48)
DC	*David Copperfield* (1849–50)
BH	*Bleak House* (1852–53)
HT	*Hard Times* (1854)
LD	*Little Dorrit* (1855–57)
TTC	*A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)
UT	*The Uncommercial Traveller* (1860)
GE	*Great Expectations* (1860–61)
OMF	*Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65)
ED	*The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1869–70)

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Part I
Introduction

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