An individual character in dialogue often repeats particular collocations. Such collocations are one of the linguistic features the character possesses, a ‘literary idiolect’ related to habits of speech. Brook (1970: 138) defines the term ‘idiolect’ as follows: ‘the speech-habits of an individual, in contrast with a dialect, which describes the speech-habits of a group’. Such individual speech-habits are ‘as unique (though not as unchangeable) as his fingerprints’ (Page 1988: 97), and may be broadly classified under two headings: ‘those indicating membership of some social or regional or other readily identifiable group, and those which are personal and idiosyncratic’ (ibid.). This chapter will focus mainly on the latter; personal speech-habits, although some reference may be made to group speech-habits in some cases. Golding (1985: 8) also discusses idiolects, that is, speech features of the characters in Dickens’ works, under ‘four general headings: linguistic, typifying, rhetorical and rhythmic’. The speech-habits of individuals to be examined in this section fall under Golding’s ‘linguistic’ heading, and will be discussed in terms of repeated collocations; collocational patterns for which characters have a predilection.

In addition to repeated collocations and collocational patterns peculiar to characters in dialogues, Esther and the third-person narrator also often use the same collocations or the same kind of collocational patterns for particular characters in their narratives (that is, non-dialogues). This section will discuss such repeated collocations and collocational patterns, as applied to particular characters in non-dialogues, first by being examined in their speech, and secondly in the narrators’ narratives (that is, non-dialogues).
6.1 Collocations peculiar to characters in their speech

Among content words in *Bleak House* the highly-frequent word *friend* (292 times, Rank 69; Table 5.1) occurs 225 times in speech (138 times in the third-person dialogue, 87 times in Esther’s dialogue). The word *friends* is also used primarily in speech and appears 81 times (55 times in the third-person dialogue, 26 times in Esther’s dialogue), while *friends* is used 108 times throughout the text of *Bleak House*. Therefore, 77 per cent of the singular form *friend* (225 times out of 292) and 75 per cent of the plural form *friends* (81 times out of 108) appear in speeches. What is characteristic in the collocations of *friend* and *friends* in speech is the use of terms of address. With regard to the use of terms of address Page (1971: 16) states:

The fictional usefulness of forms of address is twofold: in the first place, they may serve to define and emphasise the nature of a relationship, both in terms of social class and in terms of degrees of intimacy or formality; and secondly, the novelist is able to modify these forms in a manner which suggests, economically but often powerfully, a temporary or permanent shift in the relationship concerned.

This section, therefore, discusses Dickens’ use of *friend* and *friends*. The collocations of *friend* and *friends* functioning as terms of address also show different collocational tendencies from character to character. For example, the term of address *my friends* will enable readers to remember Mr Chadband, a minister, who delivers a hypocritical sermon:

‘*My friends,*’ says Mr. Chadband. ‘Peace be on this house! On the master thereof, on the mistress thereof, on the young maidens, and on the young men! *My friends,* why do I wish for peace? What is peace? Is it war? No. Is it strife? No. Is it lovely, and gentle, and beautiful, and pleasant, and serene, and joyful? O yes! Therefore, *my friends,* I wish for peace, upon you and upon yours.’ (Ch. 19)

In general, the form of address *my friends* is ‘applied to a mere acquaintance, or to a stranger, as a mark of goodwill or kindly condescension on the part of the speaker’ (OED). However, the repeated collocation *my friends*, in an immediate context, loses the main function of *my friend* working as a mark of goodwill or kindly condescension on the part of the speaker, and carries and reinforces an oratorical tone through the repeated use of rhetorical questions.