Preface

Given the obvious value of a comprehensive multilingual dictionary, there have been relatively few attempts at compiling one. While most of those that have been offered in the past have been quite interesting for the philologically minded to peruse, they have been of little practical use, for they have most often been simple word lists with scant accompanying grammatical information and no real effort to distinguish between various employments of the same word. As I came to realize shortly after I began compiling this dictionary, the reason for both the paucity of such offerings and for their simplicity lies in the fact that whatever difficulties are faced in compiling a bilingual dictionary are compounded over and over again by the necessity of coordinating the correspondences between each column of a multilingual dictionary.

Although this edition only offers the four major Western European languages, I have produced a vaster lexical work containing just as many entries for two other languages, namely Russian and Korean, as well as for an extensive thematic categorization scheme. The task was indeed daunting, and though I sometimes regretted that I had ever begun, somehow I persevered over a seven-year period, and the results are this offering, which contains 21,860 entries in each of its seven sections, for a grand total of 153,020 entries. These entries incorporate those of many previous multilingual dictionaries as well as those of many lists of the most frequently used words in the languages in question. Using these sources as a base for selecting my vocabulary items, I compared and corrected their offerings, systematically adding thousands of additional words at my own discretion as I did so. Therefore, whatever failings my dictionary may have, I believe it to be the most thorough and comprehensive multilingual dictionary of fundamental or core words that has ever been compiled as well as the most extensive multilingual thematic classification of words to date.

Each entry in this dictionary includes all pertinent grammatical information for correct use of the word in question—grammatical gender, indications of irregular plural or verbal formation, etc. Additionally, most entries include the correct prepositions or case markers to be used with the word and/or optional extended phrasings of the word enclosed in (round brackets), synonyms that further define the word enclosed in {squiggly brackets}, and an indication of the situation or context in which the word is to be used enclosed in [square brackets]. The thematic classification system assigns words according to their usage to twenty-one different broad major categories (e.g., nature, language, culture) and then further into an additional 188 specific numbered sub-categories (e.g., astronomy, literature, religion). Users of this dictionary can thus find related words grouped together for systematic comparative vocabulary study and acquisition.

Each section in this dictionary has been proofread repeatedly for accuracy of translation and for typographical format—first by me myself during the process of compilation, then by student research assistants checking all the entries against those in standard published dictionaries in constant consultation with me, and finally by native scholars or professional proofreaders in each language. Still, it is obvious that such a large and intricate work cannot be error-free in its first edition. I thank all the individuals who have helped me with the editing of this work over the years and give them all much credit for making many improvements in the opus, but I freely acknowledge that the blame for all its errors and shortcomings lies completely on my own shoulders.

Indeed, no one could be more cognizant of the dictionary’s failings than I myself am.
First of all there is the content itself, for some common and useful words are missing while other relatively obscure items are included. Then there is sometimes a failure of correspondence between the translated terms across all the linguistic boundaries. Furthermore, despite all the efforts to weed them out, there is certainly no small number of typos and simple errors in grammatical classification. The thematic classification of words, one of the work’s overall strongest features, will sometimes seem random and arbitrary if not simply wrong. Finally, the fact that both Russian and Korean were originally included but have been removed from this edition may mean that there are a number of unnecessary entries, for these languages have quite different linguistic categories and thus require entries that are unnecessary for Western languages. For instance, Russian has different words for “to get married” for men and for women, and Korean has utterly different sets of words for kinship terms such as “brother,” e.g., “older brother of a man,” “older brother of a woman,” younger brother…, etc.” In this edition, I have tried to remove all entries that were included for the sake of these two languages but which provide unnecessarily precise distinctions among the Western four, but a certain number may remain.

I very much hope that the present offering will be only a first edition, and that a revised and corrected edition will soon follow after many individual instances of the failures just mentioned above have been signaled by users of the dictionary. Indeed, while I do not wish to devote my entire scholarly life to lexicography, I would like to continue working on this project to produce future expanded versions that include not only more words but also more languages. As my files already include fully corresponding entries for both Russian and Korean, I naturally hope to see them reinstated in the future. Additionally, I have already made a fair number of entries for Italian. The format in which this dictionary was compiled is such that additional languages, added in new columns and checked carefully for correspondence with several of the others should, in theory, correspond with all of the others as well. However, the project was always too large and ambitious for any one individual to undertake alone. If a linguistic institution could see the value of such a project and give it solid backing, and if other scholars would be interested in collaborating in the compilation process of additional languages from an early stage, then I believe that a truly vast international and multilingual dictionary, perhaps one that could even be called “universal,” could be built upon the basis of this dictionary in the future. I would be very happy to receive any and all statements of interest in this project. Indeed, there is hope and expectation that while in my current position at the American University of Science and Technology in Beirut, Lebanon, I may receive the support and assistance necessary to add an Arabic column in the foreseeable future.

In the meantime, I must stress that this dictionary is not designed to replace conventional bilingual dictionaries. Because of its size and scope, it does not indicate imitated pronunciation or give complete sample sentences, and both of these features are essential in any authoritative manual. Anyone working exclusively with a single foreign language should certainly have access to a larger and more comprehensive bilingual dictionary than this one, which is designed to supplement regular dictionaries for students who have studied more than one foreign language and who can use the comparative information to better retain the meaning of words. Aside from being a study aid for the multilingual and a reference tool for comparative philologists, this dictionary should also be of assistance to professional translators at international events.