English is one of the few languages where word order greatly affects meaning. This is because the English language lost its case endings centuries ago and had to find a different method of expressing the concepts that they originally conveyed. The three Hebrew words that would be literally rendered "killed--the man--the lion" might be translated into English as "The man killed the lion," or "The lion killed the man." Only context could determine which meaning was intended. To avoid this confusion Hebrew often inserts the particle ʾeth to indicate that the following word is a direct object.

Early in the Christian era a man named Aquila decided to make an accurate word-for-word translation of the Pentateuch from Hebrew into Greek. Greek, however, has no word corresponding to ʾeth. Since the Hebrew word ʾeth can also represent the preposition "with" Aquila always rendered it in Greek by sun, thus making Genesis 1:1 read: "In the beginning God created with the heaven and with the earth." This makes no sense in English or in Greek, and illustrates the fact that a word-for-word translation is apt to be of little value, unless the reader already is rather familiar with the language from which the translation was made.

There are two features involved in every attempt to express thought by writing. One is the attempt to convey a precise meaning, as in a mathematical table; the other is the effort to move the emotions, as in elevated poetry. Most writing partakes to some extent of both functions. When the attempt is made to translate in such a way as both to convey the precise meaning and also to carry something of the original impact, the difficulty is greatly increased. Yet if an effort is not made in this