Invited Comment on 'This and that in TB/ST'
Graham Thurgood

Of necessity, Benedict's discussion of Tibeto-Burman deitics is complex and far-ranging. At one point or another in the history of TB, the deitics have been incorporated, on the nominal side, into pronominal systems, ergative case marking systems, and topicalization; on the verbal side, deitics have been incorporated into pronominal agreement systems, tense-aspect systems, and copular systems. As a consequence, the very complexity of that paper makes it difficult in a short space to do much more than comment on isolated parts.

The copula *way (p. 85). It is not clear that the difference between the rhymes of Thurgood's Proto-Lolo-Burmese *way and Bradley's Proto-Loloish *way reflects anything more than the fact that the reconstructions are for different levels; however, Benedict's reconstruction of PLB *s-wanú for Lahu we is a different matter. Thus far attempts to derive Lahu we, Lisu rgh3, and Akha eu from a single etymon have never been totally satisfactory, perhaps because three reflexes derive from two phonologically similar but distinct etymons: PLB *s-wanú and *way. (Note: the PLB *-an rhyme will not work for Akha eu; PLB *-ay does not normally give the rhyme reflex found in Lahu we)

Pronouns, pronominalization, and PTB *ga [pp. 85-6, P. 96, fn. 15]. Bauman (1975) equated the *ga found in Kiranti as the initial element in the disyllabic first person independent pronoun [PTB *ga + *ga 'I' > Proto-Kiranti *gaga 'I'] and as the first person subject agreement marker [PK *ka- '1st'] with the Chin *ga also found as the first element of a disyllabic first person pronoun [PC *kai 'I' < *ga + *i] and as the first person subject agreement marker [PC *ka- '1st']. In Kiranti, the evidence for the reconstruction of a disyllabic first person pronoun *gaga 'I' is overwhelming. The Eastern Branch shows transparently obvious reflexes of *gaga, while Dumi of the Western Branch requires only a *gaga > *gagou > *gawu shift; only the Baining unK no longer shows a disyllabic root, but even here the vowel quality suggests the former presence of *ga [*gaga > *gagou > *gowu > *gow > *go 'I']. In Chin, the *ga appears again in *kai 'I' [< *ga + *i] but with little evidence of an accompanying *ga 'I'.

However, Benedict's contention that pronominalization is a recent innovation is supported not undermined by the nature of the comparative evidence. Within Kiranti, the majority of the languages still preserve the disyllabic pronoun *gaga 'I' often with the component parts still readily identifiable on inspection; here, the very pervasiveness and lack of degeneration in the modern roots argues strongly for the recency of the system. Within Chin, the *kai 'I'[*ga + *i] root is found as such not just in each subgroup but also in almost every language; again, the extreme pervasiveness and uniformity of the modern reflexes as well as the roots of the pronominalization system argues strongly for its recency. The independence of the Kiranti and the Chin systems is obvious from the fact that a distinct second element occurs in both disyllabic roots.

The pronominal use of *ga has developed out of an earlier topicalizer use [cf. WB ka' for a topicalizing use; cf. Karen for an example where a topicalizer we has merged with a first person subject but not object pronoun ('I': ja (O), ja (S) < ja 'I' + we].