

This Kibbitzer is based on an extract from a dissertation by Chinese-speaking student of education:

Original	Revision
<p>More contemporary psychological approaches such as information processing, in contrast to Piaget's general-purpose functioning of mind, they have argued that mind is genetically structured into special-purpose "modules", ...</p>	<p>In contrast with Piaget's view of the general-purpose functioning of mind, contemporary psychologists using models based on information processing have argued that mind is genetically structured into special-purpose "modules", ...</p>

Writers such as Charles Li ¹ have pointed to a general difference between 'subject-prominent' languages such as English, and 'topic-prominent' languages such as Chinese. With a subject-prominent language the primary responsibility of the speaker or writer is to name the subject of the verb. With a 'topic-prominent' language the primary responsibility is to name the Topic of the sentence (i.e. what it is about), with the possibility that the subject may be named separately:

Zheige shu	yezi	hen da
This tree	leaf	very large
TOPIC	SUBJECT	

i.e. in (subject-prominent) English 'This tree has very large leaves' or 'The leaves of this tree are very large.'

This general typological difference between the two languages often underlies the problems that Chinese-speakers have in writing English. In the present example the writer has attempted to name both a Topic ('More contemporary psychological approaches') and a Subject ('they'). The proposed revision focuses on the Subject-verb relationship, and in recasting the sentence replaces the abstract 'approaches' by the human 'psychologists' as a more appropriate subject of 'argue'. A subsequent concordance shows a limited range of abstract nouns being used as the subject of 'argue', 'approach' not being one of them.

1 : that **strategic planning, efficiency, and economies of scale** argued for big authorities, while
 2 on Easter Island. The **evidence** of physical anthropology also argues against a westward migration
 3 and to evolve. Others believe the **evidence** from homeobox genes argues otherwise: so similar are
 4 invention is brought into force, say the authors. The **strategy** argues that advances in biotechn
 5 oirs of infection still survive in Eastern Europe. One **theory** argues that the Black Death in E
 6 ce for the infection theory of childhood leukaemia. The **theory** argues that when populations are
 7 l can experience pain and distress. Evolutionary **theory**, too, argues the kinship of the specie

¹Li, Charles N. and Sandra A. Thompson 'Subject and Topic: A New Typology of Language' in C.N. Li (ed.) *Subject and Topic* (New York: Academic Press, 1976).