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ISSUES

The social semiotic construction of chemical periodicity: A multimodal view

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Abstract

Chemical periodicity is widely recognized as one fundamental idea in science and much of the existing research attempts to discover one periodic table most accurately depicting the natural order. This article adopts a multimodal perspective on the periodic system by analyzing its historical evolution and the constructed nature of periodic tables. The analysis indicates that chemical periodicity was culturally shaped as specialized functionalities for classifying elements by their similar chemical behaviors. We argue that tabular representations have powerful yet constrained modal affordances to interpret

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scientific phenomena and that social semiotics provides a preliminary meta-language for teaching and learning chemical periodicity.

Keywords: chemical periodicity; periodic table; multimodality; social semiotics; grammar; modal affordances

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