SEMANTIC PROFILES, BASES, DOMAINS, AND MATRICES

Linguistic concepts do not function autonomously; they function in relation to other concepts within larger conceptual configurations. According to Ronald Langacker (1987, 183), "The semantic value of an expression … derives from the designation of a specific entity identified and characterized by its position within a larger configuration."[3] For example, one cannot understand the concept of a "radius" unless they understand the concept of a "circle." Figure 3.1 illustrates the relationship of these two terms. The concept "radius" is *profiled* against the conceptual *base* of the concept "circle."[4] Many semantic units have multiple and complicated conceptual bases, and many involve more than one profile. As an example, we may profile the concept of "aunt" against the kinship system illustrated in figure 3.2.[5] The parent/child, spouse, sibling, and male/female concepts are all required on at least the intuitive level for an adequate conceptualization of the prototypical sense.
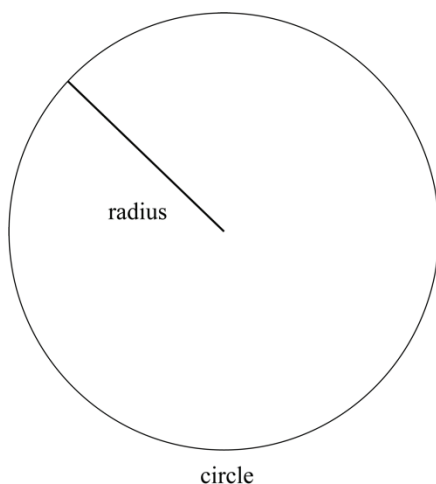

Figure 3.1. Illustration of "radius" being profiled against a circle.

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[3] John Taylor argues a base is "the conceptual content that is inherently, intrinsically, and obligatorily invoked by the expression" (Taylor 2002, 195).

[4] The profile is not to be confused with an expression's referent (Taylor 2002, 194). The former is a conceptualization that inhabits a mental space, while the latter is an instantiation in the real world of that concept.

[5] This image is adapted from Langacker 2002, 15.