



Figure 3.2. Illustration of “aunt” profiled against the kinship system.

A conceptual base is required for a basic understanding of a semantic expression, but there are other aspects of the broader conceptual backdrop against which an expression can be profiled for a fuller conceptualization. That backdrop is what cognitive linguists call a *domain*, and this term suggests a conceptual field within which there can be movement and differentiation. John Taylor (2002, 195) notes, “the distinction between base and domain is not always clear-cut. Essentially, the distinction has to do with how intrinsic the broader conceptualization is to the semantic unit, how immediately relevant it is, and to what extent aspects of the broader conceptualization are specifically elaborated.” He provides the example of “thumbnail,” which profiles against “thumb” as its base. “Thumb,” in turn, profiles against “hand,” which itself profiles against “arm,” which profiles against “torso,” or even “human body.” It would be imprecise to say “thumb” profiles against “human body” as its base, though. Rather, human body constitutes the conceptual domain within which multiple profile/base relationships may operate, with or without direct reference to the former.⁶

Just as a domain may contain multiple different profiles and bases, most semantic expressions can be conceptualized against multiple domains, or a conceptual matrix. An example is the concept “mother.” George Lakoff (1987a, 74) identifies five different domains that may be activated by the term in reference to a human:⁷

⁶ For the conceptual domain for HUMAN BODY, see Langacker 1987, 147–54.

⁷ He uses the term *model*, but the concept is the same as our term *domain* (cf. Taylor 2003, 87–90).