Phonological systems are not made up of isolated and unrelated phonological rules: there are usually significant interactions between phonological processes. This chapter concentrates on two related topics. First, the fact that a seemingly complex set of alternations can often be given a simpler explanation if you separate the effect of different rules which often happen to apply in the same form. Second, applying rules in different orders can have a significant effect on the way that a given underlying form is mapped onto a surface form.

5.1 Separating the effects of different rules

Very often, when you analyze phonological alternations, insights into the nature of these alternations are revealed once you realize that a word may be subject to more than one rule, each of which may affect the same segment. You should not think of a phonology as being just a collection of direct statements of the relation between underlying segments and their surface realization. Such a description is likely to be confusing and complex, and will miss a number of important generalizations. Look for ways to decompose a problem into separate, smaller parts, stated in terms of simple and general rules. The different effects which these rules can have on a segment may accumulate, to give a seemingly complex pattern of phonetic change.

5.1.1 Votic: palatalization and raising/fronting

The following example from Votic (Russia) illustrates one way in which the account of phonological alternations can be made tractable by analyzing the alternations in terms of the interaction between independent phonological processes. In these examples, [ɫ] represents a velarized *l*.

(1) a. *Nominative*   *Partitive*
         vərkko   vərkkoa   'net'
         čako   čakoa   'cuckoo'
         lintu   lintua   'bird'
         saatu   saatua   'garden'
         yałka   yałkaa   'foot'
         bočka   bočkaa   'barrel'
         einæ   einææ   'hay'
         vævü   vævüæ   'son-in-law'

     b. siili   siiliæ   'hedgehog'
         łusti   łustia   'pretty'

     c. yarvi   yarvəa   'lake'
         mæči   mæčeæ   'hill'
         čivi   čiveæ   'stone'

     d. kurči   kurkəa   'stork'
         əłči   əłkəa   'straw'
         kahči   kahkəa   'birch'