The Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures (Michaelis et al. 2013, henceforth APiCS) is an extremely welcome contribution to the field of contact linguistics, in that it provides the most comprehensive descriptive work on contact languages to date (incidentally, its publication coincides with that of another, more theory-oriented anthology on contact languages, Bakker and Matras 2013). It thus fills a gap in language contact research by making available a wealth of empirical documentation on high-contact varieties. The discipline has namely been in sore need of such a reference tool in order to, among other things, investigate the differences and commonalities between a broad variety of contact languages, which has in fact been the impetus for creole studies since their very inception – with the notable innovation that many pidgins and creoles not based on Indo-European languages are also included in the APiCS. Moreover, it provides a typological lens through which contact languages can be incorporated into the wider pool of variation displayed by the languages of the world.

The APiCS consists of four volumes for a grand total of 1504 pages. The first volume, the Atlas proper, printed on glossy high-quality paper, describes some 130 (mostly structural, and some lexical) features in 76 contact languages worldwide, based on various lexifiers. Naturally, pidgins and creoles which have already been studied in depth, for instance those of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean (e.g. Jamaican or Mauritian Creole), have been included. In addition, many lesser-known, or even extinct varieties (such as Pidgin Hindustani spoken on Fiji, or Batavia Creole, formerly spoken in Indonesia) are covered. Each chapter includes a colour map showing the distribution of APiCS languages, as well as the frequency of occurrence of a construction in cases where an alternative strategy is possible. The features are reasonably spread so as to cover all major areas of grammar: 12 features relate to word order (features 1–12), 24 to nominal categories (13–36), six to nominal syntax (37–42), 14 to verbal categories (43–56), 16 to argument marking (57–72), 19 to clausal syntax (73–91), eight to complex sentences (92–99), seven to negation, questions and focusing (100–106), 11 to lexicon (107–117) and 13 to phonology (118–130). Each subsection is richly illustrated with a myriad of examples. The features were inspired in part by the World Atlas of Language Structures (Haselmath et al. 2005; Dryer and Haspelmath 2013, henceforth WALS) and the Comparative
Creole Syntax volume (Holm and Patrick 2007). Also, features traditionally discussed in the literature (such as serial verb constructions and systems of TMA marking) are included, as well as a number of other typological traits. These were selected in order to provide a synchronic snapshot of each individual language.

As a side note, the editors have to be commanded for using the Gall-Peter’s projection (as opposed to the more popular alternative, the Mercator projection) for their maps in the printed volumes (although the choice was not carried over in the online edition due to compatibility issues with the WALS). This choice makes sense in light of the fact that the greatest linguistic diversity is found around the Equator and, as pointed out by the editors in the introduction (Michaelis et al. 2013: xlv), a majority of contact varieties worldwide are also concentrated in circum-equatorial regions, in line with traditional languages, and biological species as well for that matter.

The other three volumes (the Surveys) focus each on a particular group of contact varieties according to their lexifier. The first describes 29 Germanic-based languages (Volume I, English-based and Dutch-based Languages), the second focuses on 29 varieties based on Romance languages (Volume II, Portuguese-based, Spanish-based, and French-based Languages), while the third surveys 18 contact languages not derived from an Indo-European source (Volume III, Contact Languages Based on Languages From Africa, Australia, and the Americas). Each volume is structured in a consistent way, providing information on each individual language. A short introduction opens the chapter, with a black-and-white map situating the language geographically. Some information on the socio-historical background that led to its emergence follows, as well as a summary of its current socio-linguistic situation. A short grammatical sketch is provided for every language, covering phonology and syntax, to which a short glossed text is added. For a majority of languages, a sound sample is also available via the online version. An index at the end of each volume facilitates the task of finding particular languages involved in the relevant contact situations, and very conveniently, all known substrate languages are listed individually as well.

Although the title suggests that the APiCS only includes varieties traditionally viewed as pidgins or creoles, other types of contact varieties, such as mixed languages, are also taken into account. Since most proposals for classifying high-contact varieties have not been accepted unanimously by the creolist community, no language in the APiCS was assigned to a particular category. This choice was deliberately made by the editors of the APiCS, who, aware of the controversies surrounding the status of some of those languages, have left it for the users to decide to which category a particular language belongs.