

## APPENDIX

As mentioned in the introduction, there are a handful of examples attested in corpora where *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just, right then’ is an adverb, i.e., one word, as evidenced by its co-occurrence with the aspectual *zài* 在, leading to the sequence: [<sub>AspP</sub> [<sub>adv</sub> *zhèngzài* 正在] [<sub>AspP</sub> *zài* 在 VP]] (cf. [2a-d] below). More precisely, concerning the two corpora consulted (in November 2021), the PKU-CCL corpus ([http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl\\_corpus](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_corpus)) features ten examples and the BLU-BCC corpus (<http://bcc.blcu.edu.cn>) twenty-four examples. Three different structures can be found.

i) ‘*zhèngzài* 正在 [<sub>PP</sub> *zài* 在 NP] VP’

It makes up for half of the cases (6 of 10 examples in the PKU-CCL corpus, and 12 of 24 in the BLU BCC corpus, respectively). The majority involves haplology (noted as *zài* 在) of the progressive aspect *zài* 在 and the preposition *zài* 在 of the immediately adjacent *zài* 在-PP. The progressive aspect *zài* 在 must be present underlyingly to explain the non-habitual reading of what at the surface looks like bare verbs. (Recall from section 4 that non-stative bare verbs are only acceptable as sole predicates in a root sentence when giving rise to a habitual reading.) This analysis is confirmed by sentence (1d) where the adjunct PP is headed by *hé* 和 ‘with’ and preceded by both the adverb *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’ and the aspectual *zài* 在:

(1a) 这群人正在在我家打边炉。

Zhè qún rén zhèngzài zài wǒ jiā dǎ biānlú.  
this group people just      PROGR+at 1sg home strike side.stove  
‘This group of people is just enjoying a Cantonese hotpot  
at my place.’

(1b) 比赛正在在兰州举行。

Bǐsài zhèngzài zài Lánzhōu jǔxíng.  
competition just      PROGR+at Lanzhou hold  
‘The match is just going on in Lanzhou.’

(1c) 这部电视剧正在在北京拍摄。  
Zhè bù diànshìjù zhèngzài zài Běijīng pāishè.  
this cl TV.drama just PROGR+at Beijing shoot  
'This TV drama is just being filmed in Beijing.'

(1d) Tā [AspP 正在 [AspP 在 [PP 和朋友] 交谈]].  
Tā [AspP zhèngzài [AspP zài [PP hé péngyǒu] jiāotán]].  
3sg just PROGR with friend chat  
'He is just chatting with friends.'

ii) 'zhèngzài 正在 [AspP zài 在 VP]'

The co-occurrence of *zhèngzài* 正在 with the aspectual *zài* 在 immediately preceding a VP clearly points to the adverbial status of *zhèngzài* 正在 'just, right then'.

(2a) 他正在在学习中文。  
Tā zhèngzài zài xuéxí zhōngwén.  
3sg just PROGR learn Chinese  
'He is just learning Chinese.'

(2b) 同事们正在在购买礼品。  
Tóngshìmen zhèngzài zài gòumǎi lǐpǐn.  
colleagues just PROGR buy gift  
'The colleagues are just buying gifts.'

(2c) 积雪正在在迅速地旋转着。  
Jīxuě zhèngzài zài xùnsùde xuánzhuǎn-zhe.  
snow just PROGR rapidly spin -dur  
'The snow is just spinning rapidly.'

(2d) 渔业资源正在在急剧减少。  
Yúyè zīyuán zhèngzài zài jíjù jiǎnshǎo.  
fishery resource just PROGR sharp decrease  
'Fishery resources are just declining sharply.'

iii) ‘zhèngzài 正在 [VP [V° zài 在] PostP]’

In this structure, the adverb *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’ precedes the (stative) verb *zài* 在 ‘be at’, which in turn selects a postpositional phrase as its complement. Given the well-known fact that the verb *zài* 在 ‘be at’ is incompatible with any aspect marker, this again confirms the status of *zhèngzài* 正在 as an adverb, on a par with *zhèng* 正 ‘just’, not with the aspectual head *zài* 在.

(3a) 各方保证[<sub>VP</sub> 正在 [<sub>VP</sub> 在[<sub>PostP</sub> 会谈中]]]。

Gè fāng bǎozhèng [<sub>VP</sub> zhèngzài [<sub>VP</sub> zài [<sub>PostP</sub> huìtán zhōng]]]  
each side assure just be.at talks in  
‘All parties assure to be presently (engaged) in talks.’

(3b) 他似乎此刻正在在冷风里。

Tā sìhū cǐkè zhèngzài zài lěng fēng lǐ.  
3sg seemingly at.present just be.at cold wind in  
‘It seems as though he is just in a cold wind right now.’

(3c) 本公司的“蓝星大厦”正在在建设中。

Běn gōngsī de ‘lán -xīng-dàshà’ zhèngzài zài jiànshè zhōng.  
IPL company SUB blue-star -building just be.at build in  
The “blue star” building of our company is just under construction.’

(3d) 电话正在在接通中。

Diànhuà zhèngzài zài jiētōng zhōng.  
phone just be.at put.through in  
‘The phone is just connecting.’

While the majority of the 1-word-*zhèngzài* 正在 examples are from the microblogging website *Weibo* 微博 and hence probably rather recent (although no year is indicated here), there are also some dated occurrences from other text genres.

The earliest attestation for ‘*zhèngzài* 正在 [<sub>PP</sub> zài 在 NP] VP’ (group 1) is 1979 (in the Chinese translation of Rachel Carson’s *Silent spring* from 1962). For group 2, ‘*zhèngzài* 正在 [<sub>AspP</sub> zài 在 VP]’, we have 1998 (in Ren Yihong’s *Ài nǐ bù liú yú dì* 爱你不留余地). Concerning group 3,

*zhèngzài* 正在 [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V°</sub> *zài* 在] PostP]], it is first attested in a *Rénmín Ribào* 人民日报(People's Daily) article from 1997. This is noteworthy because “negligence” as a consequence of the fast writing mode in *Weibo* 微博 can be excluded as a possible factor for the use of the adverb *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just, right then’. More importantly, it nicely illustrates the difference between a change itself, more precisely the creation of a new adverb *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just, right then’ and its *diffusion* among the speakers evolving in time, with an increase in the period covered by *Weibo* 微博. (Cf. Hale 2007 for extensive discussion of *change* vs *diffusion* of that change.)

The examples in (1) – (3) above (occasionally shortened in parts not relevant for the problem under discussion) also provided the material for our informal online questionnaire, whose aim was to find speakers who actually use the adverb *zhèngzài* 正在 in combination with the aspectual *zài* 在 +VP. All the sentences were double-checked for their acceptability with *zhèng* 正 ‘just’ instead of *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’ for the “canonical” group of native speakers, as represented by one of the co-authors. In addition, we chose two [+ human] subjects and two [-human] subjects for each group, even though we think it highly unlikely that this could have any influence on the outcome.

Sixty-one participants took part in the online questionnaire where the twelve sentences above were augmented by twelve filler sentences and presented in a randomized order. Five judgement types were offered: completely acceptable (100%), probably acceptable (??OK), probably unacceptable (??\*), completely unacceptable (\*) and “I don’t know” (Ø). While detailed information on the judgements per sentence is provided in the overview at the end of the appendix, the results can be summarized as follows.

The structure in (1) ‘*zhèngzài* 正在 [<sub>PP</sub> *zài* 在 NP] VP’ with a preverbal *zài* 在-PP, and the structure ‘*zhèngzài* 正在 [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V°</sub> *zài* 在] PostP]’ in (3) where the adverb *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’ precedes the verb *zài* 在 ‘be at’, received eleven and thirteen “100% acceptable” judgements, respectively; the structure in (2) ‘*zhèngzài* 正在 [<sub>ASP</sub> *zài* 在 VP] with *zhèngzài* 正在 preceding ‘aspectual *zài* 在 + VP’ was judged “100% acceptable” only four times.

While the comparatively high frequency (within the modest sample at hand) of the adverb *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’ preceding a *zài* 在-PP looks plausible, because it can be linked to the phenomenon of haplogy (cf. section 4 above), the comparatively high frequency of *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’ with the verb *zài* 在 ‘be at’ is at first sight somewhat surprising, given that the verb *zài* 在 is incompatible with any aspect marker and accordingly, there does not exist any potential source structure for the possible reanalysis of the adverb *zhèng* 正 ‘just’ and the aspectual *zài* 在 into the adverb *zhèngzài* 正在: \*[<sub>Adv</sub> *zhèng*] [<sub>AspP</sub> *zài* 在 [<sub>V°</sub> *zài* 在 ]]. The only possible parallel we can see is that with the adjunct NP *xiànzài* 现在 ‘now’, acceptable as modifier of the verb *zài* 在 ‘be at’, as in e.g., *Tā xiànzài zài jiā* 他现在在家 ‘3SG now be.at home’ = ‘She is at home now.’

There were only two speakers among the sixty-one who accepted all of the test sentences with either “100% acceptable” or “probably acceptable”. Our initial purpose of the questionnaire (besides confirming the findings in the corpora), i.e., being able to ask follow-up questions in order to further test the distribution of the adverb *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’ was therefore seriously hampered. We nevertheless checked two data points: the acceptability of *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’ (cf. 4a) in contexts where the canonical speakers only use the adverb *zhèng* 正 ‘just’ and where aspectual *zài* 在 is excluded (cf. [4b] and the discussion in section 2 above), and the acceptability of *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’ in the topic position before the subject (cf. [5a]), a position excluded for low VP adverbs such as *zhèng* 正 ‘just’ (cf. [5b]), but acceptable for adjunct NPs such as *xiànzài* 现在 ‘now’ (cf. [5c]):

- (4a) 你来得真巧，我 [<sub>Adv</sub> 正在] 要找你。  
 Nǐ lái DE zhēn qiǎo , wǒ [<sub>Adv</sub> zhèngzài] yào zhǎo nǐ.  
 2SG come DE really opportune 1SG just want search 2SG  
 (Intended: ‘You’ve come at the right time, just as I wanted to go see you.’)
- (4b) 你来得真巧，我 [<sub>Adv</sub> 正] (\* [<sub>Asp°</sub> 在]) 要找你。  
 Nǐ lái de zhēn qiǎo , wǒ [<sub>Adv</sub> zhèng] (\* [<sub>Asp°</sub> zài]) yào zhǎo nǐ.  
 2SG come DE really opp. 1SG just PROGR want search 2SG  
 ‘You’ve come at the right time, just as I wanted to go see you.’


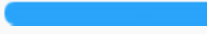
- (5a) 放心吧, [Adv 正在] 呢,  
 Fàng xīn ba, [Adv zhèngzài] ne,  
 put heart SFP just TOP  
 电话在 [PostP 接通中], 你准备说吧。  
 diànhuà zài [PostP jiētōng zhōng], nǐ zhǔnbèi shuō ba.  
 phone be.at put.through in 2SG prepare talk SFP  
 (Intended: ‘Be reassured, the phone is just connecting, get ready to talk.’)
- (5b) 放心吧, (\*正呢,)  
 Fàng xīn ba, (\*zhèng ne,)  
 put heart SFP just TOP  
 电话正在 [PostP 接通中], 你准备说吧。  
 diànhuà zhèng zài [PostP jiētōng zhōng], nǐ zhǔnbèi shuō ba.  
 phone just be.at put.through in 2SG prepare talk SFP  
 ‘Be reassured, the phone is just connecting, get ready to talk.’
- (5c) 放心吧, 现在呢,  
 Fàng xīn ba, xiànzài ne,  
 put heart SFP now TOP  
 电话(正)在 [PostP 接通中], 你准备说吧。  
 diànhuà (zhèng) zài [PostP jiētōng zhōng], nǐ zhǔnbèi shuō ba.  
 phone just be.at put.through in 2SG prepare talk SFP  
 ‘Be reassured, the phone is just connecting right now, get ready to talk.’

However, the results of our mini-test were inconclusive; the sentences were either rejected as unacceptable or as too difficult to judge.


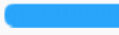



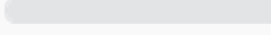
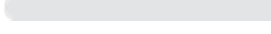
## Data from the Acceptability Judgment Test

### A. Participants' information (general): Total N=61

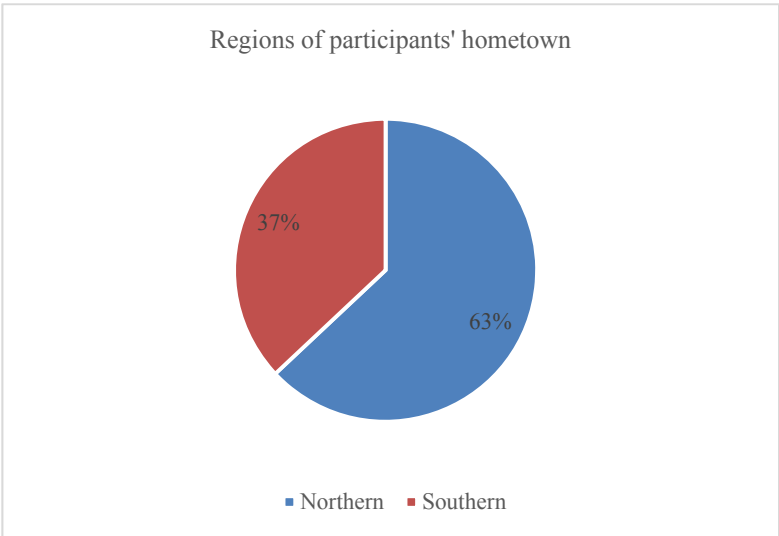
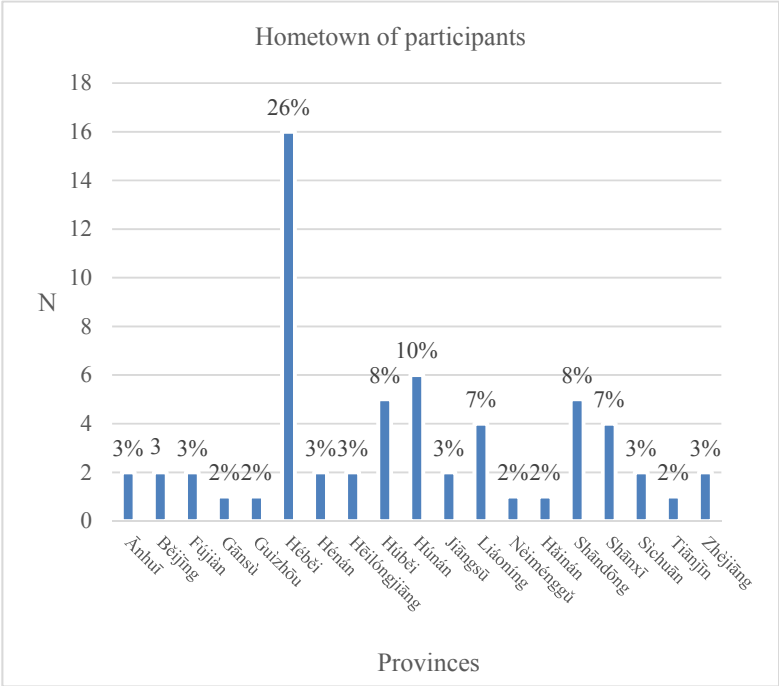
(1) Gender:

Gender	N	Percentage
Male	16	 26.23%
Female	45	 73.77%
Total N	61	

(2) Age ranges:

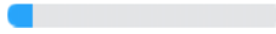
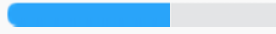
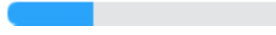
Age ranges	N	Percentage
Under 18	0	 0%
18~25	26	 42.62%
26~30	18	 29.51%
31~40	16	 26.23%
41~50	1	 1.64%
51~60	0	 0%
60 and above	0	 0%
Total N	61	

(3) Hometown:





(4) Education background:

Degrees	N	Percentage
B.A.	6	 9.84%
Postgraduates	36	 59.02%
Ph.D	19	 31.15%
Total N	61	

**B. Participants' judgments on the test sentences  
(re-categorized into three groups)**

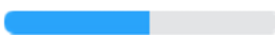
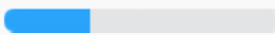
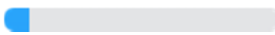
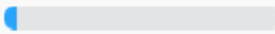
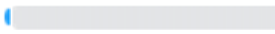
(1) **Group 1:** [VP [<sub>adv</sub> zhèngzài ] [VP [PP zài NP] VP]]

a. 这群人正在在我家打边炉。

Zhè qún rén zhèngzài zài wǒ jiā dǎ biānlú.

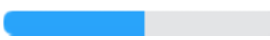
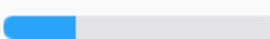
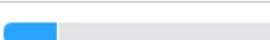
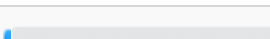
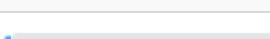
this CL people just at+PROGR 1SG home strike hot-pot

'This group of people is just enjoying a Cantonese hotpot at my place.'

Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	32	 52.46%
Probably unacceptable	19	 31.15%
Probably acceptable	6	 9.84%
Completely acceptable	3	 4.92%
I don't know	1	 1.64%
Total N	61	


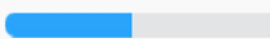
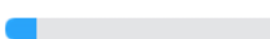
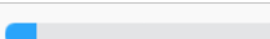
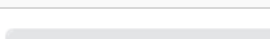
b. 比赛正在在兰州举行。

Bìsài zhèngzài zài Lánzhōu jǔxíng.  
 competition just PROGR+at Lanzhou hold  
 ‘The match is just going on in Lanzhou.’

Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	31	 50.82%
Probably unacceptable	16	 26.23%
Probably acceptable	12	 19.67%
Completely acceptable	1	 1.64%
I don't know	1	 1.64%
Total N	61	

c. 这部电视剧正在在北京拍摄。

Zhè bù diànshìjù zhèngzài zài Běijīng pāishè.  
 this cl TV.drama just PROGR+at Beijing shoot  
 ‘This TV drama is just being filmed in Beijing.’

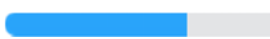
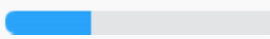
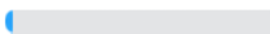
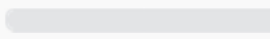
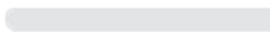
Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	19	 31.15%
Probably unacceptable	28	 45.9%
Probably acceptable	7	 11.48%
Completely acceptable	7	 11.48%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	

d. 他正在在和朋友交谈。

Tā [AspP zhèngzài [AspP zài [PP hé péngyǒu] jiāotán]]].

3sg just PROGR with friend chat

‘He is just chatting with friends.’

Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	40	 65.57%
Probably unacceptable	19	 31.15%
Probably acceptable	2	 3.28%
Completely acceptable	0	 0%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	


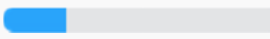

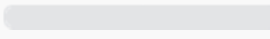
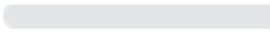
**(2) Group 2:** [adv zhèngzài] [asp zài] VP

a. 她正在在学习中文。

Tā zhèngzài zài xuéxí zhōngwén.

3sg just PROGR learn Chinese

‘She is just learning Chinese.’

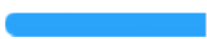




Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	46	 75.41%
Probably unacceptable	14	 22.95%
Probably acceptable	1	 1.64%
Completely acceptable	0	 0%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	

b. 同事们正在在在购买礼品。

Tóngshimen zhèngzài zài gòumǎi lǐpǐn.

colleagues just PROGR buy gift

‘The colleagues are just buying gifts.’






Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	44	 72.13%
Probably unacceptable	13	 21.31%
Probably acceptable	0	 0%
Completely acceptable	4	 6.56%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	

c. 积雪正在在迅速地旋转着。

Jīxuě zhèngzài zài xùnsùde xuánzhuǎn-zhe.

snow just PROGR rapidly spin -dur

‘The snow is just spinning rapidly.’

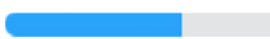
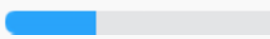
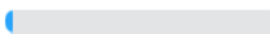
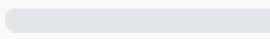
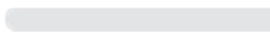
Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	42	 68.85%
Probably unacceptable	17	 27.87%
Probably acceptable	2	 3.28%
Completely acceptable	0	 0%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	

d. 渔业资源正在在急剧减少。

Yúyè zīyuán zhèngzài zài jíjù jiǎnshǎo.

fishery resource just PROGR sharp decrease

‘Fishery resources are just declining sharply.’

Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	39	 63.93%
Probably unacceptable	20	 32.79%
Probably acceptable	2	 3.28%
Completely acceptable	0	 0%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	


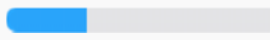
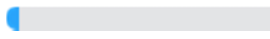
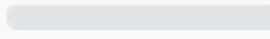
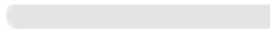
**(3) Group 3:** [<sub>adv</sub> zhèngzài] [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>Verb</sub> zài ] [<sub>PostP</sub> NP postposition]]

a. 各方保证正在在会谈中。

Gè fāng bǎozhèng zhèngzài zài huìtán zhōng

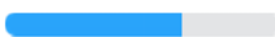
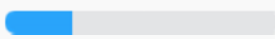
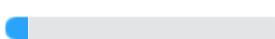
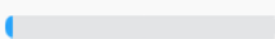
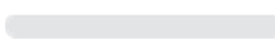
each side assure just be.at talks in

‘All parties assure to be presently (engaged) in talks.’

Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	40	 65.57%
Probably unacceptable	18	 29.51%
Probably acceptable	3	 4.92%
Completely acceptable	0	 0%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	

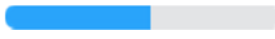
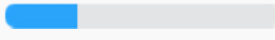
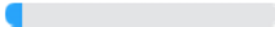
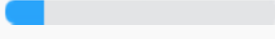
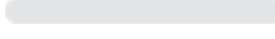
b. 他似乎此刻正在在冷风里。

Tā sìhū cǐkè zhèngzài zài lěng fēng lǐ.  
 3sg seemingly at.present just be.at cold wind in  
 ‘It seems as though he is just in a cold wind right now.’

Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	39	 63.93%
Probably unacceptable	15	 24.59%
Probably acceptable	5	 8.2%
Completely acceptable	2	 3.28%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	

c. 本公司的‘蓝星大厦’正在在建设中。

Běn gōngsī de ‘lán-xīng-dàshà’ zhèngzài zài jiànshè zhōng.  
 IPL company SUB blue-star-building just be.at build in  
 ‘The *blue star* building of our company is just under construction.’


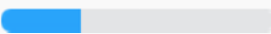



Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	32	 52.46%
Probably unacceptable	16	 26.23%
Probably acceptable	4	 6.56%
Completely acceptable	9	 14.75%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	

d. 电话正在在接通中。

Diànhuà zhèngzài zài jiētōng zhōng.

phone just be.at put.through in

‘The phone is just connecting.’


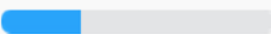



Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	39	 63.93%
Probably unacceptable	18	 29.51%
Probably acceptable	2	 3.28%
Completely acceptable	2	 3.28%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	

d. 电话正在在接通中。

Diànhuà zhèngzài zài jiētōng zhōng.

phone just be.at put.through in

‘The phone is just connecting.’

Acceptability scale	N	Percentage
Completely unacceptable	39	 63.93%
Probably unacceptable	18	 29.51%
Probably acceptable	2	 3.28%
Completely acceptable	2	 3.28%
I don't know	0	 0%
Total N	61	

