

The recent rise of “saying” ECCs: *(I’m) just saying, All I’m saying (is), and What I’m saying (is)*

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(I’m) just saying may function as an extra-clausal constituent (ECC) in Present-day English. It has reached the level of frequency to generate considerable, often prescriptive commentary on online sources (see references), though it is not treated in works on discourse markers in English. Related forms, *All I’m saying (is)* and *What I’m saying (is)*, have to date received no attention:

- (1)
- a. Well, maybe that’s a dumb idea. **I’m just saying.** (2012 COCA: FIC)
 - b. You need a little manicure. **Just saying.** (2010 COCA: SPOK)
 - c. **All I’m saying,** forget Cramer. (2004 SOAP: OLTL)
 - d. **What I’m saying is,** don’t get married in Vegas. Take your time.” (2007 COCA: MAG)

These constructions have all of the features of (para)theticals identified by Kaltenböck, Heine, and Kuteva (2011: 853). Syntactic independence and extra-clausality is shown by the fact that *(I’m) just saying* may be post-positive or stand alone as a complete utterance, and that all of the forms may be followed by non-declarative (independent) clauses. The so-called double copula construction, a phenomenon which is widely treated in the literature, is particularly telling evidence of the lexicalized nature of *all/what I’m saying is*:

- (2)
- a. So **what I’m saying is, is** that it’s nice to complain, but we can’t confirm (1998 COCA: SPOK)
 - b. **All I’m saying is, is** that we certainly shouldn’t be using military intervention to promote our interests in Africa (1991 COCA: SPOK)

Online sources agree that *I’m just saying* typically follows a statement which is either intentionally insulting or controversial or unintentionally causes offense to the hearer. According to Lee-Goldman (2011: 77) using this form is a “rhetorical backoff”, in which the speaker reaffirms his or her commitment to the truth of what was just said but not to the implications that could be drawn from having made those claims”. However, an analysis of corpus data (from SOAP, which provides relatively large numbers of examples of these forms) provides a more nuanced understanding of the function of all three.

The origins of *I’m just saying* are “murky” (Simon 2010). In this paper I will present data collected from a wide variety of historical corpora and text collections, including Google Books, to probe the sources of all three forms (in main clauses and pseudo-clefts), the dates of their appearances, and plausible routes of development. The paper will also shed light on possible reasons for the rise of the double be construction.

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