

## The rise of (*I'm*) *just saying* and related comment clauses in Present-Day English

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(*I'm*) *just saying* has reached the level of frequency to generate considerable, often prescriptive commentary in online sources, though it is not treated in works on discourse markers or comment clauses. 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. (2007 COCA: MAG)

The syntactic independence of these forms is shown by the fact that (*I'm*) *just saying* may be post-positive or stand alone as a complete utterance (as in 1a–b), and that all of the forms may be followed by non-declarative clauses (as in 1c–d). The so-called double copula (“All I'm saying is, is ...”) (e.g. Curzan 2012) is particularly telling evidence of the fossilized nature of *all/what I'm saying is*.

Online sources agree that *I'm just saying* typically follows a statement which is either insulting or 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 (politeness and hedging) function of all three.

The origins of *I'm just saying* are “murky” (Simon 2010; Liberman 2012). In this paper I will present data collected from a wide variety of historical corpora and text collections to probe the sources of all three forms (in main clauses, pseudo-clefts, or other constructions), the dates of their appearances, and plausible routes of development.

### References

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