On so-called adversative *nisi*

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1. The standard value of *nisi*

Recent studies have shown the existence of two distinct semantic and pragmatic uses of the conjunction in early and (post)classical times.¹

(A) On the one hand, *nisi*, always accompanied by a grammatically or rhetorically negative phrase *q*, displays an exclusive-restrictive function. This use is characterized by the close link between *q* and *p*, which constitute a syntactic and semantic unity corresponding to a restrictive assertion: “only *p*”, “nothing else than *p*”. *Nisi* mostly (but not necessarily) follows *q* and is accompanied by a noun phrase (NP) or by a clause (*ut*, *quod*, *quia*, etc.):

- (1) *Nihil dicam nisi singulare, nisi id quod, si in alium reum diceretur, incredibile videretur.* (Cic. *Verr.* 2, 1, 44)

‘I will say nothing except what is extraordinary, nothing except what would appear incredible, if it were alleged against any other criminal.’

(B) On the other hand, there appears a limitative-exceptive use, by which *p* restricts or nullifies the validity of *q*, thus, “unless *p*”, “except (if) *p*”, etc. The *q*-phrase is generally affirmative, but it may be negative. Orlandini (2001, p. 164-184) distinguishes three contexts of use:

(a) *nisi* followed by a NP² or by *quod* limits the validity of *q* by introducing an exception (2);

- (2) *Fores oclusae omnibus sint nisi tibi.* (Plaut. *Asin.* 759)

‘Her doors must be closed to everybody but you.’

(b) *nisi*, alone or followed by *cum*, *si*, *forte* or *vero*, refers to the only one case in which *q* loses its validity (3);

- (3) *<Heu>s senex, quid tu percontare, ad te quod nihil attinet? – <Nibi>I ad me attinet? – Nisi forte factu's praefectus novos.* (Plaut. *Most.* 940f)

‘Hey, you old man! Why do you ask questions about what is none of your business? – None of my business? – Unless you chance to be a newly elected prefect.’

1 See particularly Orlandini, 2001, p. 151-292; 2002.

2 In this case, one generally finds a universal quantifier, as in (2), or a pronoun expressing a large quantity (e.g. *plerique*). However, this use is quite rare: a search conducted on Brepol’s *Library of Latin Texts* revealed that in the whole period between the 3rd c. BC and the 3rd c. AD the pattern *omnis* (+ NP) + *nisi* only occurs 21 times.

(c) *nisi* (or typically *nī*) accompanied by the subjunctive imperfect or pluperfect hinders the realization of the matrix phrase, which is presented as nearly accomplished (4).

- (4) *Pons Sublicius iter paene hostibus dedit, nī unus vir fuisset, Horatius Cocles.* (Liv. 2, 10, 2)
 ‘The Sublicius bridge almost gave the enemy an entrance (into the city), had it not been for one man, Horatius Cocles.’

Despite their differences, (a), (b) and (c) are linked by a pause or break between *q* and *p* whose connection is, at the semantic and pragmatic level, much looser than in (A).

2. Diachronic overview

As early as the 3rd c. BC *nisi* already features all properties listed above and it has even undergone a partial semantic bleaching, for it can be followed by *si*.³ Furthermore, Plautus’ comedies may exhibit some apparently anomalous uses, many of which are explainable by ellipsis (for the adversative instances, see below 3.1), e.g.:

- (5) *Cave tu nisi quod te rogo.* (Plaut. *Truc.* 801)
 ‘Take you care (= don’t say anything), unless I ask you anything.’

In order to establish how the use of the conjunction evolves over the centuries, we have analysed a large selection of texts, from Plautus up to Late Latinity, belonging to various literary genres. For the classical period, which has been extensively studied by Orlandini (2001; 2002), the analysis has been restricted to Cicero (*Verr.*, *Fam.*) and Petronius.⁴ In addition, we have reviewed all curse tablets edited by Kropp (2008) along with a large number of inscriptions published on Clauss’ website (www.manfredclauss.de). Two major outcomes emerge from this research.

First, *nisi* is widely attested in Latin, from the archaic period until late antiquity. In all sources considered it occurs several times and one barely finds a text where it is not represented.⁵ Furthermore, although the word does not survive in Romance,⁶ its frequent appearance on inscriptions and tablets of the late period suggests that it remained common in spoken use for a long time.

Second, in postclassical and especially late sources *nisi* is far more frequently accompanied by a negative *q*. Thus, between the two functions outlined above, (A) clearly prevails. Compare the figures (neg. = negative) in Tables 1 and 2.

3 Cf. Kühner-Stegmann, 1914, p. 417, and Hofmann-Szantyr, 1972, p. 667.

4 This is the full list of the analysed texts: Plaut. (all comedies), Ter. (all comedies), Cic. *Verr.*, *Fam.*, Petron., Cypr. *Ad Donat.*, *Testim.*, *Hab. virg.*, *Unit. ecl.*, *Laps.*, *Domin. orat.*, *Mortal.*, *Fort.*, *Demetr.*, *Eleem.*, *Patient.*, *Zel.*, Comm. *Apol.*, *Peregr. Aeth.*, Eutr. *Brev.*, Chiron., Oros. *Hist.*, Vict. Vit., Paul. Nol. *Epist.*, Hist. Aug., Pomp., Cass. *Var.*, Bened., Greg. T. *Franc.*, Greg. M. *Dial.*

5 Bonnet, for instance (1890, p. 321), referring to Gregory of Tours, observes: *Nisi n’est point disparu. Au contraire, il est d’un emploi plus étendu que dans la langue classique.*

6 The only traces of *nisi* are found in Old Portuguese *nego* / *nega* (‘except’, ‘otherwise’), resulting from *nisi quod* / *nisi quia*. Cf. Hofmann-Szantyr, 1972, p. 578-88.

	3 rd /2 nd c. BC		1 st c. BC	1 st c.	3 rd c.		4 th c.		
	Plaut.	Ter.	Cic.	Petron.	Cypr.	Comm.	Peregr. Aeth.	Eutr.	Chiron.
<i>q</i> neg.	179 50.1%	49 59%	198 74%	36 76%	87 93%	15 100%	21 95%	10 77%	27 87%
<i>q</i> non neg.	172 49.9%	34 41%	71 26%	11 24%	6 7%	0 0%	1 5%	3 23%	4 13%

Table 1: Analysed literary sources

	5 th c.					6 th c.			
	<u>Oros.</u>	Vict. Vit.	Paul. Nol.	<u>Hist. Aug.</u>	Pomp.	Bened.	Greg. T.	Cassiod.	Greg. M.
<i>q</i> neg.	47 63%	26 90%	101 86%	101 72%	168 97%	24 86%	99 80%	102 89%	49 91%
<i>q</i> non neg.	27 37%	3 10%	17 14%	40 28%	5 3%	4 14%	24 20%	12 11%	5 9%

Table 2: Analysed literary sources

In Plautus, the instances with negative or non-negative *q* are equivalent, whereas in Terence the former slightly prevail. In Cicero and in Petronius, *nisi* is more frequently accompanied by a negative *q*, but in one fourth of the instances this is not the case. Furthermore, the choice of a negative *q* does not necessarily imply the exclusive function of *nisi* illustrated under (A), because in a number of cases the pragmatic-semantic link between the two sentences is loose (6).⁷

- (6) *Non dubiumst quin mi magnum ex hac re sit malum; nisi, quia necessu' fuit hoc facere, id gaudeo, propter me hisce aliquid esse eventurum mali.* (Ter. Eun. 997-9)

'There's no doubt that this thing will cause me a big punishment; except (the fact) that, since I had to do that, I'm glad that some trouble is going to fall on these women because of me!'

Very different is the picture emerging from late sources. In the great majority of cases, *nisi* is accompanied in at least 85% of the instances by a negative *q*, and in Commodianus (whose figures, though, are admittedly low) this is the only type attested. Three exceptions are found in Eutropius (who also has very low figures), the *Historia Augusta* and Orosius where the imitation of classical prose may have played a fundamental role. Additionally, in later authors, the link between *q* and *p* tends to be much stronger than in earlier centuries. Instances as (2)-(4) become

⁷ See also Orlandini, 2001, p. 168f.

rare because in many instances with positive *q*, *nisi* is followed by the subjunctive and displays a pure hypothetical force. Its function tends hence to overlap with that of *si non*. In (7), for instance, one cannot speak of two autonomous speech acts separated by a pause, because *q* expresses the potential consequences of the conditions uttered in *p*.

- (7) *Nisi tibi pro arbitrio tuo serviatur, nisi ad voluntatis obsequium pareatur, imperiosus et nimius servitutis exactor flagellas, verberas.* (Cyp. Demetr. 5)
 ‘If you are not served by him according to your pleasure, if you are not obeyed by him in conformity to your will, you, being an imperious and excessive exactor of his service, flog and scourge him.’

The partial fossilization of *nisi* to its exclusive meaning in the late period plays, as we shall see, a crucial role in the development of the substitutive function, which barely emerges before the 3rd c. AD (cf. 3.2).

3. The adversative uses of *nisi*

The existence of an adversative or contrastive function of *nisi* is mentioned in several studies. Kühner and Stegmann (1914, p. 415f) observe that in colloquial language “*einschränkende*” *nisi*, roughly corresponding to (B), often develops an adversative meaning, while Hofmann and Szantyr (1972, p. 668f) claim that this use – which again is related to “*Umgangssprache*” – results from blurred formulation and thought contamination. These and other scholars⁸ collect a number of passages, from Plautus up to Late Latin, in which *nisi* is said to replace *sed*. The problem, however, is that *sed* itself displays different semantic and pragmatic properties.⁹ From our investigation it turned out that the adversative instances collected in scholarly literature can be divided into two types. We will refer to them as adversative *nisi* 1 and 2. However, as it will be shown, only in the second type a clear contrast emerges between *q* and *p*.

3.1. Adversative *nisi* 1

This function very much resembles the one described under (B), because the semantic and pragmatic relation between *q* and *p* is rather loose – cf. (8) to (12) below.¹⁰ Here *nisi* generally follows *q* and shifts the focus to a new element, which is not in explicit contrast with the preceding one. Nearly all instances involve a verb phrase and seem to derive from the originally exclusive pattern *nihil scio* or *nescio, nisi hoc (scio)*, ‘I know nothing (or I do not know) if I don’t know this’, implying ‘I only know this’ (e.g. Plaut. *Bacch.* 587f). Starting from here, analogous expressions developed, which contributed to a gradual syntactic autonomy of the *nisi*-phrase.¹¹ A shift seems, hence, to have occurred from the (A)-type to the (B)-type. The first and most important step for ‘releasing’ the *nisi*-clause from *q* was the addition of an indirect question depending on *nescio* (8).

8 See particularly Englund, 1934, p. 50-6, and Löfstedt, 1936, p. 29-35.

9 For an overview of the different adversative relations (most of which may be expressed by *sed*), see Kroon, 1995, p. 210-17.

10 Due to their close similarity, it is often difficult (and probably pointless) to draw a border between this function of *nisi* and the one outlined at (B).

11 For various examples, cf. Lindskog, 1895, p. 129-40.

- (8) *Huic alterae quae patria sit, profecto nescio: nisi scio probiorem hanc esse quam te.* (Plaut. *Rud.* 750f)
 'As for this other girl, I don't know which her birthplace is: except that/but I do know she is better than you.'

Further variations that may occur are (a) the choice of a construction similar to *nescio, nisi hoc (scio)*, such as *nescio, nisi, ut opinor* (9), (b) the replacement of *scio* (in *q* and/or in *p*) by nearly synonymic expressions (10), or its complete deletion in *p*, which probably represents the furthest step in the evolution (11):

- (9) *Cistellam, ubi ea sit, nescio, nisi, ut opinor, loca haec circiter excidit mihi.* (Plaut. *Cist.* 676f)
 'Where the little casket is, I don't know, except that/but, as I believe, I dropped it somewhere here around.'
 (10) *De re nihil possum iudicare, nisi illud mihi persuadeo, te, talem virum, nihil temere fecisse.* (Cic. *Fam.* 13, 72, 3)
 'I cannot say anything about that, except that/but I am persuaded that such a man as you are has done nothing without the due consideration.'
 (11) *Nec qui hoc mi eveniat scio; nisi pol filium multimodis iam exspecto, ut redeat domum.* (Ter. *Hec.* 279f)
 'I don't know how this is happening to me; except that/but I really hope that my son will return home!'

Despite their differences, the variations exemplified in (8) to (11) share three common features:

- the use of *nescio* or almost synonymic expressions in *q*, often also in *p*;
- the systematic occurrence of the verb in the first person singular;¹²
- the fact of shifting the attention from something unknown, and often unimportant, to something known and more central, which often is the only thing that really matters to the speaker or writer.

Apart from the *nescio nisi (scio)* type, mostly found in ancient comedy, this type of adversativity occasionally surfaces in other contexts generally displaying a concessive type of adversativity and all characterized by a high degree of autonomy of *p* towards *q*.¹³ In imperial and late Latin this use becomes very rare and tends to disappear, which is perfectly in agreement with the evolution outlined in the two tables. Since *nisi* is predominantly accompanied by a negative *q* that reduces, at a great extent, its syntactic autonomy, it is predictable that this special use, which, as seen, generally presupposes a double movement between *q* and *p*, tends to be dismissed.

3. 2. *Adversative nisi* 2

There is a second type of adversativity that is commonly confused with the above discussed but is semantically very different. Here *nisi* displays the so-called function of substitution, by

12 There only are two exceptions, but in both of them the 1st person sing. is involved either directly (*nescimus nos quidem istum, qui siet; nisi*, Plaut. *Poen.* 649f) or indirectly (in Plaut. *Most.* 278 *nescias* is used impersonally).

13 For some examples, see Orlandini and Poccetti, 2008, p. 189-91. On concessive adversativity, see also Kroon, 1995, p. 211f. In some cases, the adversative relation is made more explicit by the addition of *tamen*. See particularly Orlandini, 2002, p. 284f.

which it overtly opposes a (mostly noun) phrase to a preceding one, as in (12) and (13).¹⁴ This is the standard meaning of Ger. *sondern*, Sp. *sino*, etc., which in Latin is usually expressed by *sed*:

- (12) *Cedet dolor omnis a corpore [...] nec erit anxietas ulla nisi gaudia semper.* (Comm. *Apol.* 801f)
 ‘All pain will leave the body [...] there will not be any anguish, but only joy.’
- (13) *Non edetis de eis (sc. carnibus) crudam, neque coctam in aqua, nisi assatam igni.* (Cypr. *testim.* 2, 15)
 ‘You shall not eat of them raw nor dressed in water, but roasted with fire.’

Unlike adversative *nisi* 1, this special function probably derives from the exclusive-restrictive one – hence, (A) – because:

- it typically occurs with noun phrases, which, conversely, are rare with (B);¹⁵
- it requires a negative marker in *q*;
- *q* is semantically incomplete without *nisi*;
- it first spreads in Late Latin, when the exclusive-restrictive function becomes dominant.

Characteristic of ‘substitutive’ *nisi* is the sharp contrast between two mutually exclusive phrases, of which the one introduced by *nisi* (that systematically follows), does not semantically belong or cannot be traced back to the former. The existence of two mutually exclusive phrases makes examples like (12) and (13) essentially different from examples of the standard (A)-type, such as (14) and (15):

- (14) *... ne quis Romae deus nisi Heliogabalus coleretur.* (Hist. Aug. *Heliog.* 3, 4)
 ‘... (purposing that) no god be worshipped at Rome save only Elagabalus.’
- (15) *Nullum [...] eis tegumen remanserat nisi parmae tantum.* (Greg. T. *Franc.* 3, 28)
 ‘No [...] covering was left to them except only for the shields.’

In (14) *nisi* performs its exclusive function because Helagabalus is considered to be a god, in fact the only god who may be worshipped. Similarly, in (15) the shields are the only type of protection left over. Conversely, in (12) *nisi* is substitutive, because *gaudia* is obviously not a form or type of *anxietas* and in (13) the three options (*crudam*, *coctam in aqua*, *assatam igni*) exclude each other.

According to common view, this special value of *nisi* goes back to archaic Latin, occasionally emerges in (post)classical times and then spreads in the late period. Our investigation points to different conclusions. From Old Latin, only two instances are known, both in Plautus, where, as seen above, some special uses of *nisi* may emerge. The interpretation of the two passages, however, is far from clear:

- (16) *Nunc mores nihili faciunt quod licet, nisi quod lubet.* (Plaut. *Trin.* 1032)
 ‘Nowadays, (men’s) manners deem not worthy what is allowed, save only/but what is pleasant.’
- (17) *Neque ego hanc superbiai causa pepuli ad meretricium quaestum, nisi ut ne esurirem.* (Plaut. *Cist.* 40f)
 ‘I didn’t drive her into prostitution out of vanity, only/but in order not to starve.’

14 On this type of adversativity, see Kroon, 1995, p. 211; 216. The development of negative conditionals (‘if not’) to substitutive conjunctions represents a well-known process, attested in a number of languages as in Sp. *sino*, Old Fr. *se non*, Late Gr. *εἰ μὴ* / *ἐὰν μὴ* (Löfstedt, 1936, p. 31-3).

15 See note 2.

In (16), *nisi* is likely to perform its standard restrictive function, considering that *quod lubet* is not necessarily exclusive with *quod licet* but may well be a subset of it.¹⁶ Different is (17), where an antithesis emerges between the two final expressions *superbiai causa* and *ut ne esurirem*. The substitutive function may hence not be ruled out (see also *OLD*, s. v. *nisi*, 5b). However, one can also assume a conflation of (a) *neque hanc superbiai causa pepuli* ('I didn't drive her into prostitution out of vanity') and (b) *neque pepuli nisi ut ne esurirem* ('I have only driven her in order not to starve'), or a sort of 'surplus' of information in *q*, that is, the redundant insertion of *superbiai causa*. Both solutions find support in at least two further Plautine passages in (18) and (19).

- (18) *(Sc. collyrae) nihili sunt crudae, nisi quas madidas gluttias.* (Plaut. *Pers.* 94)
'(Macaroni) are no good raw, (save) only those that you gulp down well boiled.'
- (19) *Nisi de opinione certum nil dico tibi.* (Plaut. *Rud.* 1092)
'This is only my opinion, I am not telling you anything for certain.'

In both examples we may assume, again, either conflation – (a) *nihili sunt crudae* / (b) *nihili sunt nisi (eae), quas*, etc. (a) *nisi de opinione nil dico* / (b) *certum nil dico* – or a redundant insertion of a nominal element in *q* (*crudae* and *certum*, respectively). Particularly instructive is the comparison between (17) and (19): if, in the latter, *q* would be postponed, one could speak also here of substitutive *nisi* ('not for certain, but according to my opinion'), but this explanation is ruled out by the word order.

After Plautus, the construction is allegedly found in Quintilian and Pseudo-Quintilian, but these instances are even more questionable:

- (20) *Quis potius leges exequetur et hominum commissa, nisi qui rem publicam administrat? Nemo istud faceret libenter, nisi necessitate.* (Quint. *Decl.* 314, 4)
'Who else will apply the laws and punish men's crimes other than the person who manages the commonwealth? No one would do it willingly, but out of necessity.'
- (21) *In qua (sc. caede) nemo utitur suo ferro nisi alieno.* (Ps. Quint. *Decl.* 1, 4)
'In which (murder) nobody uses its own sword, but that belonging to somebody else.'
- (22) *Congesta sunt adversus miseram caecitatem venenum, cruor, ferrum et quidquid non potest esse negligentiae nisi nescientis.* (Quint. *Decl.* 2, 2)
'Amassed against this poor, handicapped man are a sword, blood, poison, and whatever else which cannot be attributed to the carelessness of anybody except a moron.' (tr. Sussman)

In (20) Shackleton Bailey (2006, p. 18) does not trust the transmitted text and adds <*nemo*> before *nisi*. This interpretation finds a support in the preceding sentence where *nisi* is also used with restrictive force (*quis...*, *nisi qui*). In (21) the text is certainly corrupt, because, as observed by Håkanson (1974, p. 18f), a lawyer could barely claim that no murderer uses his own sword to kill (in fact, this *is* generally the case). Finally, in (22) there is no need to assume the substitutive function,¹⁷ as it becomes evident from Sussman's translation.

There are, however, five certain instances of the construction in Vitruvius not mentioned in literature, as in (23).¹⁸

16 Cf. Lewis and Short, 1958, p. 1209 (s. v., n. 5). A similar instance is found in Ter. *Haut.* 643.

17 This explanation, put forward by Englund, 1934, p. 54f, is based on the problematic assumption that *neglegentiae* is used instead of *negligentis* (*abstractum pro concreto*) and opposed to *nescientis*.

18 See also Vitr. 1, 5, 6; 2, 6, 3; 6 *praef.* 3; 10, 11, 1.

- (23) *In ea (sc. loca) non est potestas omnibus intro eundi nisi invitatis.* (Vitr. 6, 5, 1)
 ‘Into those (places) not everybody has the right to enter, except/but only the invited ones.’

These passages all display the same schema, by which *nisi* reduces to a single unit or subset the quantity expressed by *omnis* (always found in the plural). There appears hence a contrast between two mutually exclusive items (‘not all, but’). However, this use of *nisi* is very likely to result from a mingle between the exceptive type illustrated at (B) *omnes... nisi* x ‘everybody... but x’ – cf. (2) – and the exclusive one of (A) *non... nisi* x ‘not... except for x’ → ‘only x’, as in (1). For, on the one hand, we have the subtraction of one or more elements from a larger set, which is characteristic of (B), but, on the other hand, the double negation hints at a restrictive assertion, as in (A). Interestingly, in another passage Vitruvius (10, 8, 5) employs the same pattern with *praetor*: *non est facilis ratio neque omnibus expedita ad intellegendum praeter eos, qui*, etc.

In later literary Latin, especially since the 4th c., there are several instances of substitutive *nisi*.¹⁹ This fact is also related to a partial syntactic extension of the conjunction that occasionally is even found in lieu of *quam* after comparatives.²⁰ This is not the place to go over all late instances of substitutive *nisi*. However, one gets the impression that, at least until the 6th c., this use was not grammaticalized in the language and should rather be considered as a sporadic “deviation”. This conclusion is based on the low number of examples with respect to the entire Late Latin production²¹ and on the probable influence of the Greek bible, in which ἐὰν μὴ is often found with the same value (cf. Löfstedt, 1936, p. 31f). Revealing is the fact that all literary instances but one (Vindic. *Epist. ad Valent.* 7) occur in Christian sources,²² which suggest that this use tends to become a sort of technical feature of Christian language. Additionally, *sed* regularly performs its substitutive function until the end of Latinity and *nisi*, even when displaying contrastive force, never seems to lose entirely its exclusive meaning. A case in point is found in Jerome:

- (24) *Dicit: ‘Expectate hic tribus diebus.’ Non erat una dies, non duo, nisi tres dies. Videte quid dicat: ‘Expectate tribus diebus.’ Non nominat tres noctes, sed tres dies.* (Hier. In psalm. 86)
 ‘She says: “Wait here three days long.” It was not one day, not two, but three days. See what she says: “Wait three days long.” She does not mention three nights, but three days.’

One observes here a sort of reverse pattern as compared to the Vitruvian instances. On the one hand, *nisi* is, as in Vitruvius, semantically very closely related to the preceding negative *q*, both referring to numbers, but it denotes, on the other hand, a higher set as compared to *q* (*tres* comprises *una* and *duo*). The underlying thought responsible for the use of *nisi* may be something like ‘one or two days were not enough *unless* (until) they reached (became) three’. Interestingly, in the following sentence, in which again a substitutive pattern after negative *q* occurs but the semantic contrast between *q* and *p* is more clear-cut, Jerome resorts to the standard construction with *sed* (*non nominat tres noctes, sed tres dies*).

19 I also found an example on a curse tablet from Bath (Kropp, 2008, 3.2/37).

20 For some examples, see Löfstedt, 1936, p. 33-5. Note that this use, as the substitutive one, is only found after negative *q*.

21 We collected 30 “pure” examples (that is, not explainable by contamination), of which 21 go back to the 6th c. (14 in Gregory of Tours).

22 These figures do not include the Vitruvian instances, which, as seen, may be due to contamination.

4. Conclusions

Summing up, the uses of *nisi* traditionally labelled as “adversative” may be divided into two groups. In the first one (3.1), no strong contrast emerges between *q* and *p*. This use of *nisi* is very close to and often barely distinguishable from the limitative-exceptional one – cf. (B) – for it generally presupposes a pause between *q* and *p* and becomes very rare in imperial and late times, when exceptional *nisi* also tends to disappear. Most instances can be explained starting from the original pattern *nihil scio* or *nescio, nisi (scio)* and assuming a gradually higher autonomy of *p*. The second type is that of substitution, in which a clear-cut contrast appears between two mutually exclusive phrases (3.2). This function is likely to derive from the exclusive-restrictive one – cf. (A) – because (a) it is mostly found with noun phrases (which, conversely, are rare in (B)), (b) it requires a negative marker in *q*, (c) *q* is semantically incomplete without *p* and (d) it first spreads in Late Latin, when (A) strongly dominates. There is a view that this use has its roots in ancient comedy, occasionally surfaces in the Early Empire and then spreads in Late Latinity. We have shown that the first certain instances occur in Vitruvius, where *nisi* subtracts one or more units from a larger set denoted by *omnis (non omnes, nisi)* and one may easily assume a conflation between (A) *non... nisi* and (B) *omnes... nisi*. In later times, substitutive *nisi* becomes indeed more common, but given the relatively small number of instances, the influence of Greek and the fact that *sed* regularly performs this function, it seems very improbable that this use was grammaticalized in the language, not at least until the 6th century.

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