Negation and Focus: On the Syntax of emphasis

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In this presentation we examine sentences from spoken standard Italian of the type exemplified in (1), which form a minimal pair with those of the type exemplified in (2):

(1)   a. NO che non vengo!   (spoken standard Italian)
          no   that neg come(1st, sg)

          'No way I'm coming!'

      b. SI   che vengo!
          yes that come(1st, sg)

          'I'm definitely coming!'

(2)   a. No, non vengo.   (spoken and written standard Italian)
          no, neg come(1st,sg)

          'No, I'm not coming.'

      b. Si, vengo.
          yes come(1st, sg)

          'Yes, I'm coming!'

In the sentence in (1), *no* and *si* bear focal stress (as indicated by the capital letters) and are obligatorily followed by the complementizer *che*. In contrast, in the sentence in (2), *no* and *si* do not bear focal stress, are not followed by an overt complementizer, and are separated by the finite clause that follows it by an intonational break. As suggested by the English translations we provided, the sentences in (1) are in some sense emphatic, whereas those in (2) are not.

The goal of this work is to provide a careful characterization of the contexts in which sentences like those in (1) are appropriate and a syntactic analysis that captures their characteristic properties. In so doing, we will contribute to making the notion of emphasis more precise by showing how it is encoded in the syntax of sentences that are said to express 'emphatic negation' and 'emphatic affirmation'.