



“Focussing jokes”: Explanation

The question's “default” IS-partitioning induces a presupposition; the answer should provide the missing information asked for, but the given answers are answers to different questions (moreover, trivial ones), i.e.:

- (39) Why do firemen wear RED suspenders? (why red color)
 To keep their pants up. (reason for suspenders)
 Why do firemen wear red SUSPENDERS?
- (40) Why do we buy CLOTHES? (why clothes)
 Because we can't get them for free. (reason for buying)
 Why do we BUY clothes?
- (41) Why do we dress girls in PINK and boys in BLUE? (why pink vs. blue)



Because they can't dress themselves. (reason for us doing it)
 Why do WE dress girls in pink and boys in blue?

For 38, the difference is between:

- “broad focus” reading, where *robbing banks* is included in Rheme
- “narrow focus” reading, where only *banks* is included in Rheme, while the fact that the hearer robs something is presupposed

While without any particular context, the broad focus reading is the default, the answer answers the narrow focus reading of the question, and that's what creates the surprise effect.

- (42) Why do you rob BANKS? (why robbing)
 Because that's where the money is! (reason for why banks)