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Understanding categories-in-practices: The case of neighbour disputes

We will present preliminary findings from our ongoing investigation of neighbour relationships and disputes, for which we have collected a large corpus of neighbour-relevant interactions (in mediation sessions, in telephone calls to mediation centres, local authority environmental health services and anti-social behaviour departments, and in police interrogations with suspects). We will focus particularly on the way categories (e.g. 'neighbour', 'tart', 'woman', 'child', 'Indian', etc.) are put to use methodically in three interactional environments: (1) to establish institutional relevance in telephone call openings, (2) as a method for denying the complaint or the crime of which the speaker is accused, and (3) in accounts for why previous attempts to solve problems with neighbours have failed. Our aim is to show that, despite recent arguments to the contrary (i.e., in criticisms of 'membership categorization analysis'), it is possible to find categories working in systematic ways, as part of sequential orders of actions, and as instances of the same interactional phenomenon.