We use *this, that, these* and *those* to explain what we are talking about. We sometimes use them with nouns and we sometimes use them on their own.

We use *this* (singular) and *these* (plural) to talk about things close to us, and *that* (singular) and *those* (plural) to talk about things at some distance away from us.

*What about this* shirt for Oliver?  
*No, hold on, what about that* one over there?

So *this* is the idea of *here* and *that* is the idea of *there*?

Yes, exactly.

*Wow, that* market looks amazing. (= *there*. I’m not in the market, it’s at some distance away from me)  
*This* market is amazing. (= *here*. I’m in the market)

What about time? How does time affect *this* or *that*?

A good question. We use *that* to show distance in time as well as distance in space.  
*This* is a good film. (we’re watching it now)  
*That* was a good film. (we saw it at some time in the past)

Are *this/these* and *that/those* always used with nouns?

No, we can use them as *pronouns*, without nouns, when it’s obvious what they refer to.  
*What do you think about these* for your Uncle Bob? (pointing to trousers)  
*I’ve never seen Uncle Bob in trousers like those*. (those trousers, but we don’t need to repeat trousers)  
*Who was that?*
So they are useful words in shops or cafes. If you don’t know the word for something, you can just say, ‘Can I see that?’ or ‘I’d like those, please’ and point.

Yes, they’re very useful words!

I think I’ve heard this and that refer to more general things too, not just specific things.

That’s right. This and that can refer to what somebody has said or what has happened. This could be several things or ideas.

That’s right. (everything you said)
This is work you know! (all the things I’m doing)
That was a great concert! (something that has just happened)

What about phone language? How do people use this and that?

When you explain who is talking you say, ‘Hi, this is Dan.’
And to check who is speaking, you can say, ‘Is that Jenny?’

Can I say ‘This is me’?

No. If you’re phoning someone you know very well, you’d say ‘It’s me.’

What about introducing people to each other? Do I use this or that?

When you’re introducing one person to another person, you say, ‘Juliette, this is Marc’.

OK, thanks. That’s all for now!

Watch the video on our website!