Use of the *let it pass* strategy among ASEAN English speakers

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This study focuses on the use of the *let it pass* strategy (Firth, 1996) by English speakers from five member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) during interaction with each other. The data was from the video recordings of the participants during their conversations. Close and in-depth analyses were carried out on instances of *let it pass* used by them. Then, retrospective interviews were conducted with each participant. Results showed that *let it pass* was a communication strategy the participants used to make their conversation flow smoothly, and that they used it as long as their non-understanding of what their interlocutor was saying did not cause a communication breakdown between them. This finding leads to the conclusion that the use of *let it pass* systematically facilitates talk when English speakers from ASEAN countries communicate with each other in English. Implications are noted for English language teaching and further research.

Keywords: ASEAN English speakers, English as a lingua franca, *let it pass*, non-understanding, understanding

1. Introduction

English is extensively used as a lingua franca in ASEAN, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, territories (Kirkpatrick, 2018). The Association of Southeast Asian Nations consists of ten member countries – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The ASEAN region is a linguistically and culturally diverse region. There are over 1000 languages spoken in the region (Kirkpatrick, 2020) but there is no one common language which is mutually understandable among all the speakers in the region. Since ASEAN was founded in 1967 with five member countries, English has been used as the common language of communication among ASEAN countries. Later after expanding to ten member countries, English was officially adopted as the working language in the 2007 ASEAN Charter, and since then, there has been a growing emphasis on English in the region, being used among ASEAN countries as well as to communicate with people from non-ASEAN countries.

Many people from ASEAN countries are multilingual, and these multilinguals also use English as their second or additional language and have various levels of English proficiency. Thus, the use of English in this area fits the definition of English as a lingua franca (ELF) as English used between speakers who have a different first language (Seidlhofer, 2005) or, more specifically, as a situation of "higher-order or second-order language contact" where speakers whose English has been influenced by their first language are in contact with the English of

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speakers whose English has been influenced by a different language (Mauranen, 2018, p. 10). Given the varieties of languages which English is in contact with and the varying levels of proficiency among speakers, there is little doubt that English speakers from ASEAN countries need to use a variety of strategies to keep their conversations flowing and to avoid communication breakdowns while communicating in English.

This knowledge of the communication strategies used in ELF communication has practice applications in the teaching of English. In the ELF literature, House (2012) suggests the awareness raising of "speakers' meta-pragmatic knowledge" to the learners and users of ELF, "by developing learners' insights into their own communicative potential—their communicative strengths and deficiencies—in realizing their communicative intentions." (p. 200). Lopriore and Vettorel (2015) also suggest the ELF awareness approach in English language teaching. They mention that most of the ELT textbooks in their 2013 investigation do not include ELF awareness raising or even if included, it was not enough, and that "connections to potential opportunities to use English in the out-side-school environment are very rarely considered" (p. 15). They argue that learners should know not only the language but also how the language works in the real world situation, and so "the diversity of speakers and contexts ….. as of ELF" (p. 28) should be taken into account in English language learning.

Among ELF studies, the use of *let it pass* in ELF interactions in real world situations is an area which has not been extensively studied in the ASEAN region. Thus, the topic of the present study, the use of *let it pass* strategy by ASEAN English speakers while interacting with each other, seeks to use the example of this one strategy to extend research into this area.

2. Theoretical framework

The *let it pass* communication strategy was firstly discussed by Firth (1996) based on his data of business telephone conversations between English speakers whose first languages were different. According to Firth, *let it pass* refers to the situation when "[t]he hearer (…) lets an unknown or unclear action, word, or utterance 'pass' on the (common sense) assumption that it will either become clear or redundant as talk progresses" (p. 243). That is, in a conversation, although a speaker does not understand or is not sure what his/her interlocutor said, the speaker does not signal or interrupt the interlocutor's talk and leaves the unsure or non-understood part as it was, assuming that the message will become clear later or the interlocutor will make it clear as their conversation continues.

In the following extract, Firth discussed *let it pass* among two English speakers. In the conversation, two speakers (B and H as in Firth's original) were talking about a cheese order. Although H did not understand what "blowing" (in Line 1 and Line 4) meant in B's talk, H did not interrupt B at the beginning. Instead, H used *let it pass* and acted as if he understood what B was saying. Only when B asked H what they should do, H started asking B (in Line 9) what "blowing" meant. Firth discussed that although the two English speakers were from different first language backgrounds, they managed to arrive at understanding each other. However, the use of *let it pass* alone was not workable, and the *let it pass* user needed to resolve his non-understanding later to arrive at actual understanding.

Extract 1

1	B:	… so I told him <u>not</u> to u::h send the:: <u>cheese</u> after the- (.) the <u>blowing</u> (.) in
2		the ↑<u>cus</u>toms
3		(0.4)
4		we don't <u>want</u> the order after the cheese is u::h (.) blowing.
5	H:	I see, yes.
6	B:	so I don't know <u>what</u> we can uh do with the order <u>now</u>. (.) What do <u>you</u>
7		think we should uh do with this all ↑<u>blo:w</u>ing Mister Hansen
8		(0.5)
9	H:	I'm not uh (0.7) <u>blow</u>ing uh what uh, <u>what</u> is this u::h too <u>big</u> or what?
10		(0.2)
11	B:	<u>no</u> the cheese is ↑<u>bad</u> Mister Hansen
12		(0.4)
13		it is like (.) fer<u>men</u>ting in the customs' cool <u>rooms</u>
14	H:	ah it's gone <u>off</u>↑.
15	B:	yes it's <u>gone</u> off↓
16	H:	we::ll you know you don't have to uh do uh <u>any</u>thing because it's not ...
		((turn continues))

(Firth, 1996: 244, original emphasis)

Further research has been done over the years on ELF communication strategies in general and specifically *let it pass* strategy showing that it is through the use of these and other strategies that ELF communication functions effectively (House, 2010).

In previous literature on English speakers from ASEAN countries, Kirkpatrick (2007b) stated that they use communication strategies to cooperate with other speakers in their interactions for effective communication. It was also stated that the aim of the use of communication strategies is to preserve face among the speakers, and one of the communication strategies English speakers from ASEAN countries use is *let it pass*. For example, in the following extract, Kirkpatrick (2007b) stated that the Thai participant (T1) and the Bruneian participant (B1) used *let it pass* for the Vietnamese participant's (V1) pronunciation of "/tɔtʃ/" (in Line 1) for the word "taught". Kirkpatrick also stated that it was not sure whether the Thai and Bruneian participants understood what the Vietnamese participant said. However, both the Thai participant and the Bruneian participant used backchannels to make the Vietnamese participant continue talking, hoping that they would understand it later.

Extract 2

1	V1:	On the first year, um ... those students um will be taught /tɔtʃ/ all
2		the basic er rules
3	T1:	mm
4	V1:	Like … I I mean this, for the er for the sub- for the grammar subject
5		itself, it's not for interpreter skills.

6   B1:   mmm
7   V1:   so, er…..

(Kirkpatrick, 2007b: 33, Original emphasis)

Kirkpatrick's study was based on the data from the audio-recordings done at the Regional Language Centre (RELC) in Singapore, and it is not clear whether there was retrospection with the participants after the recordings or not. There is no information on how the speakers resolved their non-understanding later after the use of *let it pass* in their conversation.

There is relatively little literature on the use of *let it pass* among English speakers from ASEAN countries, and it is of interest to ELF researchers and ELT practitioners to document the purposes for the use of *let it pass* by English speakers from ASEAN countries and whether the *let it pass* users resolve their non-understanding later to arrive at actual understanding as in Firth's example above. Thus, the research questions in this present study are as follows:

- 1. Why do the English speakers from ASEAN countries say they use *let it pass* in their communication?
- 2. When they do not arrive at understanding later after the use of *let it pass*, do they resolve their non-understanding to arrive at actual understanding? Why or why not?

The data collected and the analysis of it will allow for the further documentation that the *let it pass* communication strategy is used in ASEAN ELF communication. Furthermore, with retrospective interviews, this study also allows for a more fine-grained analysis than has been done before as to the reasons for the use of the strategy and the ultimate results of its use.

3. Method

This data comes from a larger project by the author of this paper which investigates ELF communication strategies in general in the ASEAN context.

3.1. Participants

In the study, there were 10 participants from five ASEAN countries who were students at a Thai university and Hungarian universities at the time of the data collection. The data was planned to be collected at a university in Thailand and at SEAMEO RELC in Singapore in order to include English speakers from as many ASEAN countries as possible. Unfortunately, a few months after the first phase of data collection in Thailand in December 2019, there were travel restrictions because of covid situations. Therefore, the data collection site was changed, and the remainder of the data was collected in Hungary.

The participants in this study were divided into five groups in which they interacted with each other in English while engaging in a planned task. There were three participants in Group A while there were two participants in each of the other groups. One Indonesian (I4) participant took part in two recordings; therefore, there are only 10 total participants instead of 11 in the study.

The self-reported linguistic background of each participant is shown in Table 1. Although participants did not estimate proficiency levels for the languages they speak, they did indicate the languages they were only slightly proficient in by saying they had "some" ability to use the

language. ELF communication inherently involves multilingual participants (Jenkins, 2015), and this can be seen among these participants by the diverse number of languages spoken by them.

Table 1. Participants according to nationality, their first language and the other languages they reported knowing

Participants		Nationality	First language	Other reported languages
Group A	B1	Myanmar/ Burmese	Burmese	English
	I1	Indonesian	Butonese	Bahasa Indonesia, English
	T1	Thai	Thai	English, some Khmer
Group B	I2	Indonesian	Bahasa Indonesia	Sundanese, English, Russian
	T2	Thai	Thai	English, some Chinese
Group C	C1	Cambodian	Khmer	English, some French, some Hungarian
	I3	Indonesian	Manado Melayu	Bahasa Indonesia, English, German, Spanish, Italian, some Hungarian
Group D	I4	Indonesian	Javanese	Bahasa Indonesia, English, some Hungarian
	B2	Myanmar/ Burmese	Burmese	English, some Hungarian
Group E	I4	Indonesian	Javanese	Bahasa Indonesia, English, some Hungarian
	M1	Malaysian	Malay	English, some Arabic, some Thai, some Hungarian

3.2. Procedure

As mentioned in the previous section, participants were divided into groups which were comprised of different first language speakers and were given one of two different tasks which were centered around the topic of traditional foods and dishes in the region. These tasks involved the discussion of traditional foods or the actual cooking of those foods.

For Groups A and B, it was not possible to do the actual cooking because there was not a kitchen available on the day and at the place of the video recording for data collection. In Group A there were participants from the following nationalities: Burmese, Indonesian, and Thai, and this group discussed the topic *Thai foods they like and Thai foods they don't like*. Participants in Group B were Indonesian and Thai, and they spoke about the recipes for their nationality's traditional dishes.

Groups C, D, and E were engaged in actually directing each other how to cook each other's traditional dishes, live, in the kitchen of the researcher or in one of the participants' kitchens. The participants in Group C were Cambodian and an Indonesian, and they cooked the Indonesian participant's recipe. In Group D, the participants were an Indonesian and a

Malaysian, and they cooked a dish which is common in both countries. Finally, in Group E, the participants were Burmese and Indonesian, and they cooked the Indonesian participant's recipe.

The conversations of each group were not only audio recorded but also video recorded in order to include the gestures and facial expressions of the participants during their conversations. After the recording, retrospective interviews were conducted, assisted by the researcher's observation notes during the video recording. The purpose of the retrospective interviews was to collect data on the thought processes of the participants during the interaction that they were engaged in, a process of data collection which has been used for decades in applied linguistics (Bowles, 2019). During the interviews, each recorded video was watched together with the researcher and the participants, and at each moment when there was a question to each participant by the researcher or when a participant wanted to say or add something, the video was paused. For example, while participants in Group B, an Indonesian (I2) and a Thai (T2), were talking about their recipes, T2 *let it pass* as evidenced by her later indication that she did not understand what I2 was saying. (See Extract 4 in Findings and discussion section.) In this kind of moment, the video was paused and the researcher asked T2 questions like "Why did you *let it pass* instead of asking for clarification here?" Also, while participants in Group E were cooking, the Indonesian participant (I4) said to the Malaysian participant (M1): "Can you put the garlic please?". Actually, I4 wanted to say "Can you take the garlic please?" So, while watching the video, I4 signaled to pause the video during the retrospection and she said she wanted to say "Can you take the garlic please?" Interviews were also conducted individually if one of the participants in a group preferred that the interlocutor not be with them during the interview.

Observation notes were also taken by the author, who observed each conversation taking place. These notes were used to help guide the retrospection sessions and also further served as data themselves in the final analysis of the interaction.

3.3. Data analysis

The data for the study were the transcriptions of the recorded videos, the observation notes during the recordings, and the notes from the retrospective interviews. In the transcripts, the participants' names were coded by the initials of their respective nationalities such as 'I' for Indonesian, and 'T' for Thai. As there were two nationalities of which names start with 'M', 'B' was used for the participants from Myanmar (who are also known as Burmese), and 'M' was used for the Malaysian participant. Then, transcripts were analyzed together with the notes made during the video recordings, and the notes from the follow-up retrospections with participants.

For data analysis, as the emphasis of the study was the participants' use of *let it pass* in their conversations, the extracts related to this research focus were selected. Then, conversation analysis as carried out in Atkinson and Heritage (1984) was employed, also using an adjusted version of their transcription conventions, which can be found in Appendix A.

4. Findings and discussion

In this study, it was found that the participants used *let it pass* accompanied by backchannels as in Kirkpatrick (2007b). In the retrospective interviews, the participants who used *let it pass* said

they hoped that later it would become clear what they did not understand earlier. However, these participants found that it did not always happen this way. It was noteworthy what these participants did when they realized their hopes did not come true. At that time, some participants started using other communication strategies (e.g. clarification requests) which could make more understandable what their interlocutors had said.

In the present study, it was found that there were two types of *let it pass* users: those who used other communication strategies to arrive at understanding, and those who did not try anything to arrive at understanding, and just *let it pass*.

To look at the first type of *let it pass* users, it was found in the study that they first waited for the moment they arrived at understanding. Then, if their interlocutors' following utterances did not make them understand, they used other communication strategies to arrive at their understanding. Extract 3 is an example of the uses of other communication strategies by a *let it pass* user to arrive at understanding. This example is extracted from the conversation of Group A of whose participants were a Burmese, an Indonesian and a Thai. They were discussing Thai foods.

Extract 3

1	B1:	I don't remember it. Sometimes, that smell has: that smell
2		they told me that smell come from the plant.
3	T1:	Umm umm.
4	B1:	Vegetable one kind of vegetable. That has a lot of smell.
5	T1:	Onn.

[Eight lines pass. The full extract can be seen in Appendix B]

14	B1:	I don't know the name.
15	T1:	That's I think it's a kind of celery.
16	B1:	Maybe.
17	T1:	That is the I think is=
18	I1:	Ah:
19	T1:	=*keun-chai*. They call it *keun-chai*.

[Nine lines pass. The full extract can be seen in Appendix B]

29	T1:	But, this one is like green.
30	B1:	Green. Yes. It looks like green and yeah I'm not sure the name.
31	T1:	Hmm hmm.
32	B1:	But, I don't like the smell that that that plant. And they add it.
33	T1:	They put it on the hotpot.
34	B1:	Yeah in the hot-
35	T1:	With the morning glory, pumpkin?
36	B1:	Yeah. The morning glory, pumpkin.
37	T1:	I think it's *keun-chai*.
38	I1:	Ah:::
39	B1:	Yeah. So when they add it, I don't want to eat. ((laughs))

In Extract 3, the Burmese participant (B1) was talking about an ingredient she did not like in Thai foods. Although the Thai participant (T1) did not understand what B1 said, he did not

interrupt her speaking with other communicative strategies. He used *let it pass* accompanied by the backchannels "Umm umm" in Line 3 and "Onn" in Line 5 for the non-understanding, hoping that she would continue the talk till he arrived at understanding. Then, B1 continued talking about in which food that ingredient could be found. B1 gave the information that the vegetable/plant she was referring to was put in the hotpot, together with other vegetables such as morning glory and cabbage. They continued their talk till they achieved the understanding of what B1 was saying at the beginning, i.e., celery which is called *keun-chai* in Thai. In the process of arriving at understanding, first T1 mentioned the name of that ingredient in English as in Line 15 and in Thai as in Line 19. Then, T1 used a confirmation check in Line 29 for the colour of that ingredient, another confirmation check in Line 33 to confirm that the ingredient was included in hotpot, and the third confirmation check in Line 35 to confirm that the ingredient was put in hotpot together with other vegetables such as morning glory and cabbage. After these confirmation checks with B1, T1 realized that the ingredient B1 was talking about was celery. In this example, T1 used *let it pass* at the beginning without interrupting B1 even though T1 did not understand what B1 was saying. Then, after B1's additional information, T1 got an idea that the ingredient B1 was talking about was celery. Then, T1 used confirmation checks to conclude that the ingredient B1 was talking about was definitely celery. Later, in the retrospective interview, T1 said that his confirmation checks made him sure that what B1 was talking about was celery. In this way, the Thai participant in the study arrived at understanding by using confirmation checks even though he had used *let it pass* at the beginning.

In the same extract (Extract 3), the Burmese participant (B1) also used *let it pass* although she did not understand what celery was in the Thai participant's (T1) talk in Line 15. She confirmed later in the interview with the researcher that she did not ask for clarification as she was sure that T1 would point out the ingredient she was talking about as the conversation went on. That's why she said she just used "Maybe" in Line 16.

Another example of *let it pass* found in the study was in Group B's conversation, Extract 4, whose participants were an Indonesian (I2) and a Thai (T2), who were again speaking about traditional food. In the conversation, I2 was talking about the recipe of an Indonesian dish, *pecel*. In Extract 4, I2 started talking about "dough" in Line 2 and she spoke about how to make "dough" in Line 3. Then, I2 mentioned to put some corn in the dough. When I2 said "corn" in Line 4, T2 used a question as a clarification request in Line 5. However, although T2 did not understand what dough was, she did not ask for clarification from I2 and *let it pass*. In the retrospective interview, T2 said that she thought she would understand it later. However, later when she could not imagine what dough was, T2 started asking I2 questions. For example, in Line 20, T2 asked I2 if dough was like boiled rice. Also, in Line 23, T2 asked I2 whether I2 boiled the dough or not, then whether I2 fried the dough or not in Line 25. It was quite a long time that T2 let her non-understanding of the word dough pass. It took 40 seconds between her *let it pass* and her first clarification request in Line 20. Before arriving at understanding for what dough was, T2 also used repetitions as a clarification request in Line 28. Then, T2 understood what dough was in Line 30 after I2 gave her an example i.e. "pancake dough" in Line 29. Later in the conversation, I2 explained that the dough for *pecel* was not that watery as in pancake dough.

Extract 4

1	I2:	And then after that, you can have umm like you need make you need
2		to fry some dough. So, like this dough, ((gesture of making dough))
3		you just put some flour, and mix it with water. And then, you put
4		some corn.
5	T2:	Some what?
6	I2:	Corn.

[13 lines pass. The full extract can be seen in Appendix B]

20	T2:	Umm. Ah: It's a kind of like umm I don't know ah: boil rice?
21		No. But, but it's powder rice? It's it's flour. It's not it's not rice.
22	I2:	Yea-
23	T2:	You boil it? You boil it?
24	I2:	No. No. Not not-
25	T2:	You fry? You fry?
26	I2:	Yeah. So, it's like: You make the dough. So, the dough consists of
27		water and flour.
28	T2:	Dough? Dough?
29	I2:	Dough. Yeah. Dough. Like you know pancake dough.
30	T2:	Ah: OK. OK.

In this example, T2 used *let it pass* at the beginning without interrupting B1 when she did not understand what dough was, hoping that she would understand later. However, later when she did not arrive at understanding for what dough was, T2 started asking questions to I2, and then used a repetition before she got the idea for what dough was. This example shows that even though *let it pass* is used, English speakers from ASEAN countries use other communication strategies when necessary to arrive at understanding.

However, there was an occasion in the study where the same participant, i.e. T2, later on in the task did not use any other communication strategies even though she did not understand what the interlocutor said. In Extract 5, I2 was talking about the vegetable ingredients included in pecel. When I2 did not remember how to say a leaf vegetable in English, first I2 code-switched into Bahasa Indonesia for that leaf vegetable by saying "sawi" as in Line 4, then she said it was "lettuce" as in Line 7. T2 did not understand what lettuce was, and she repeated "Lettuce" as in Line 8, and used backchannels in Line 10, thinking by herself what lettuce was. From T2's repetition in Line 8 and T2's posture and facial expression noted in Line 10, I2 noticed that T2 did not know what lettuce was. So, I2 used a gesture to let T2 know the shape of lettuce. Even though T2 used backchannels in Line 12 and some more backchannels in her response to I2 in Line 14, T2 still did not get any idea for what lettuce was, and she just let-it-pass here, hoping that she would understand later. In the retrospective interview, T2 said that she did not know what lettuce was at the beginning and she used let it pass. Later, she got an idea for what lettuce was by herself, recalling I2's explanation for the colour of lettuce and for the shape of lettuce by saying it was like cabbage.

Extract 5

1	I2:	((laughs)) It's really good. And actually, you just need to bring like
2		the greens, any green leaves you want as long as it- the color is green.
3		So, you can have like spinach, you can have like um what what is
4		*sawi*? ((laughs)) I don't remember. I don't remember.
5		((laughs)) like these these ((gesture for the shape of the leaf)) cabbage.
6	T2:	Cabbage?
7	I2:	Not really not really cabbage. li:- lettuce.
8	T2:	Lettuce?
9	I2:	Yeah.
10	T2:	Hmm hmm. ((posture and facial expression of thinking))
11	I2:	Yeah. Like the white one. ((gesture for the shape of lettuce))
12	T2:	Ah hmm hmm.
13	I2:	You know?
14	T2:	Ah umm. OK. Yeah.
15	I2:	Yeah. You can have that one. You can have like the green leaf of
16		anything with leaf, and anything with green in color.

In this example, although T2 did not know what lettuce was, she just *let it pass* with backchannels. T2 did not interrupt I2's talk with other additional communication strategies like clarification request. T2 tried to arrive at her understanding later by herself by recalling what I2 had said.

In the study, it was also found that there were participants who used *let it pass* but the reason behind their use of *let it pass* was not that they hoped they would understand later what their interlocutors had said. The following extract (Extract 6) was from the Group C conversation between a Cambodian participant (C1) and an Indonesian participant (I3), who were cooking an Indonesian snack.

Extract 6

1	I3:	So, first thing first. What we are going to do is you will start dicing
2		the garlic ((points at the garlic cloves)) in small into small piece.
3	C1:	OK. ((takes garlic cloves and holds in the hand))
4	I3:	Ah.
5	C1:	Where is the cut? ((uses gesture of cutting))
6	I3:	You can use the- you can have a look there.
7	C1:	((goes to the dish drainer and looks for the knife among the utensils
8		put in it, then takes a knife and comes back to the table on which
9		a chopping board already placed by I3))
10	I3:	Yeah. I used to make it into the like a paste
11	C1:	((washes the chopping board))
12	I3:	with the garlic but since we don't have mortar and pestle here, so

13		we can just dice it up
14	C1:	((finishes washing and come back to the table))
15	I3:	into small pieces.

In Extract 6, there were two moments C1 did not understand clearly what I3 had said. The first one was when I3 said: "I used to make it into like a paste" in Line 10, and the second one was when I3 said: "…since we don't have mortar and pestle here, so we can just dice it up into small pieces." in Line 12, Line 13 and Line 15. At these moments, C1 just *let it pass* and did not ask for any clarification request. Later, when C1 cut garlic, it was not in the way I3 had said, but C1 chopped garlic in his own way. During the retrospective interview, C1 said that even though he did not clearly understand what I3 said, he could guess what I3 wanted him to do with his knowledge of cooking.

This example shows that all the *let it pass* users do not *let it pass*, hoping that what they do not understand will be clear later. There are some *let it pass* users who just *let it pass* for what they do not understand, and guess the meaning followed by their own action based on their guess.

The same situation was also found in the conversation of Group D whose participants were a Burmese (B2) and an Indonesian (I4). The following (Extract 7) was from their cooking activity of an Indonesian dish, *opor*. In the conversation, B2 and I4 were talking about galangal, a kind of spice commonly used in some ASEAN countries. When B2 cut galangal, I4 wanted to say that B2 did not need to cut the galangal, but he needed to press it. Then, I4 wanted to say they usually use a pestle in Indonesia to crush the galangal, but I4 did not remember the word and so I4 used the word "pusher" in Line 14. Here, B2 did not understand what I4 meant for the word "pusher" in Line 14. However, B2 did not ask any questions but used backchannels as in Line 16. Even though I4 added the information that the *pusher* was made of stone, B2 still did not understand what it meant, but B2 used backchannels again in Line 18. In the retrospective interview, B2 said that although he did not understand what I4 had said, he did not interrupt I4 and just *let it pass* because he guessed what I4 wanted him to do was to crush the galangal, and he knew how to crush it with knife. Therefore, whether he understood what *pusher* meant or not was nothing related to what he needed to do in their cooking activity, and he did not need clarification for the term. That is why he *let it pass* without any hope that he would understand it later.

Extract 7

1	B2:	((throws away the galangal skin in the bin, washes the galangal and the knife))
2		OK. After that?
3	I4:	Yeah. It's a little bit hard to press. I don't know:
4	B2:	Oh! press?
5	I4:	Yeah. To push-
6	B2:	((starts cutting the galangal into pieces))
7	I4:	Ah no no no. With ah like the garlic, you: [:
8	B2:	[Yeah like XXXXX but I cannot
9		press.
10	I4:	Oh. Yeah yeah yeah yeah. Easily-

11	B2:	After slicing. [Yeah. Yeah.
12	I4:	[OK. I understand
13	B2:	((cuts the galangal into pieces))
14	I4:	Yeah. Usually in Indonesia, we have like pusher you know: ((gesture of
15		pressing))
16	B2:	Aww aww aww.
17	I4:	From stone. ((laughs))
18	B2:	Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yes.
19	I4:	But I cannot find here.
20	B2:	((throws away the skins into the bin)) Yeah. Yeah. OK.
21	I4:	That stuff.

This example also shows that the *let it pass* users who are English speakers from ASEAN countries also use *let it pass* in cases without hoping that what they do not understand now will become clear later. Moreover, this example shows that the *let it pass* users also use the strategy when they do not need clarification at all.

A similar situation was found in the conversation of Group D again. In Extract 8, B2 and I4 were talking about bay leaf during their cooking activity of *opor*. In the conversation, I4 *let it pass* for what she did not understand and did not ask for clarification at all, thinking that she did not need to know about it. In the conversation, I4 was talking about "bay leaves" as in Line 1 which they would be using in their cooking. Actually, the two leaves the two participants were talking about were mismatched. B2 thought that the bay leaf they would be using in their cooking which I4 was saying was the bael leaf he knew. So, he started talking about the thorny bael tree and the difficulty of picking the bael leaf in Line 8. When B2 was talking about the bael leaf he knew, I4 did not interrupt and just *let it pass* till Line 16 although she was not clear about what B2 was talking. Although she knew that there are no thorns around the bay leaf, and she did not understand the content of what B2 was talking, I4 did not ask for any clarification. In the retrospective interview, I4 said that she just *let it pass* at that point because she thought the content of what B2 was talking was not related to their cooking, and so she thought that it was not necessary for her to know about it.

Extract 8

1	I4:	Yeah. In my country, also bay leaves can grow ah everywhere.
2	B2:	Yeah.
3	I4:	Usually everywhere but it's especially in the high-high-high-high place,
4	B2:	Hmm hmm.
5	I4:	like mountains.
6	B2:	Hmm hmm hmm.
7	I4:	Hmm Hmm. ((laughs))
8	B2:	You know, but it's a little difficult to pluck these leaves from
9		the bael tree because it has some spines.
10	I4:	Hmm hmm.
11	B2:	They are very sharpening. You know not very sharp.
12	I4:	Hmm Hmm.

13	B2:	Very pointed.
14	I4:	Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
15	B2:	That's why very dangerous but it can produce the good smell.
16		That's why I brought I like ((chuckles very quietly)) this bael leaf.

This example shows that the English speakers from ASEAN countries sometimes use *let it pass* when they think they simply do not need to understand what their interlocutor is saying.

Similarly, I4 also *let it pass* for what she did not understand but did not ask for clarification at all in her conversation with another interlocutor in another cooking activity. Extract 9 was from the conversation between I4 and a Malaysian participant (M1) while they were cooking *nasi goreng,* which is one of the most commonly eaten foods in both Indonesia and Malaysia.

Extract 9

1	M1:	Hm: so, I spent a lot of time in Jakarta.
2	I4:	Hm hm. Hm hm.
3	M1:	And the lecturers and also some students there always bring me ah
4		to many good restaurants, and I love the spicy food like *ayam*,
5		*ayam geprek*, *ayam-=*
6	I4:	Ah yeah.
7	M1:	=*ayam ga- gam- gamis garmis*, I don't remember.
8	I4:	Hm hm.

In Extract 9, M1 was talking about which Indonesian foods he had had and liked when he was in Indonesia. At that time M1 code-switched to indicate the Indonesian foods he fell in love with. M1's code-switching in Line 4 and Line 5 made I4 easily understand which Indonesian foods M1 was talking about. However, when M1 said *ayam garmis* in Line 7, I4 did not understand it. As M1 was not sure how to say that Indonesian food, he just pronounced the name as he remembered. Although I4 did not understand it, she used a backchannel in Line 8, *letting it pass*. Later in the retrospective interview, I4 said that she did not know which Indonesian food M1 was talking about but she *let-it-pass* because that was not related to their cooking activity, and she thought she did not need to understand that part. She said although she *let it pass*, they could continue and accomplish their cooking activity. In this example, I4 thought that she did not need clarification for what she did not understand, without hoping that it will be clear later.

This example shows that the *let it pass* users among English speakers in the ASEAN context may use the *let it pass* strategy when they think that their non-understanding will not hinder their communication, and when they think that they do not need clarification at all.

When the *let it pass* users in the study were asked why they used *let it pass* in their conversations, all of them replied that they did not want to make their interlocutor feel embarrassed, and also they wanted their conversation to flow smoothly without interruption. For T1 from Group A and T2 from Group B, they said that first they hoped what they did not understand would become clear later. That's why they *let it pass*, and only when they realized that their *let it pass* did not make their hopes come true, they resolved their non-understanding

by using other communication strategies such as a confirmation check by T1 in Extract 3 and asking for clarification by T2 in Extract 4.

However, not all the *let it pass* users in the study resolved their non-understanding later after their use of *let it pass*. Although T2 resolved her non-understanding in Extract 4, she did not resolve her non-understanding in Extract 5. She just tried to arrive at her understanding later by herself by recalling what her interlocutor had said. Also, as discussed in Extract 6 and Extract 7, C1 and B2 did not resolve their non-understanding after their use of *let it pass*. They said that although they did not understand their interlocutor, they knew what to do from their previous knowledge of cooking and so, they just *let it pass* for their non-understanding.

There was a different reason for the use of *let it pass* and not resolving the non-understanding in Extract 8 and Extract 9. In these two examples, I4 said that she did not need to understand what the interlocutors had said because it was not related to and would not hinder their task of cooking. That's why she just *let it pass* and did not resolve it later either.

To answer the first research question, why English speakers from ASEAN countries say they use *let it pass* in their communication, it was found that the English speakers in this present research thought that their non-understanding part would be clear later as in Firth (1996), and they also did not want to make their interlocutor feel embarrassed. They thought that their interruption with other communication strategies may hinder the smoothness of their conversation flow, and also some interlocutors may feel embarrassed upon the interruption. That's why some English speakers in the study did not interrupt their interlocutors, and tried to arrive at their understanding by themselves by guessing the meaning based on their previous experience and knowledge of cooking.

For the second research question, whether when they do not arrive at understanding later after the use of *let it pass*, they resolve their non-understanding to arrive at actual understanding and why or why not, it was found that some English speakers in the present study tried to resolve their non-understanding by using other communication strategies such as confirmation checks and clarification requests when they realized that they could not arrive at understanding after their use of *let it pass* whereas other English speakers in the present study did not resolve their non-understanding.

The first reason why they did or did not resolve their non-understanding depends on the type of task they were given. For example, participants from Group A and Group B were not doing the actual cooking activity like participants from other groups so there were no ingredients around them. So, when B1 from Group A was talking about the ingredient she did not like, there was nothing around T1 which helped him guess that the ingredient B1 was talking about was celery, and so T1 resolved his non-understanding with some confirmation checks to know that the ingredient B1 was talking about was celery.

Unlike them, when I4 from Group D was telling B2 that people in her country usually use a "pusher" (she meant pestle) to crush the galangal, B2 did not understand what I4 meant but they were cooking in the kitchen and there were the ingredients and the utensils they needed around them. Actually, that was his first experience using the galangal in cooking. But the hardness of the galangal made him realize that he needed to use something to crush it. Therefore, although he did not understand what "pusher" meant, he did not resolve his non-understanding and just put the galangal on the chopping board and crushed it with a big knife.

Another reason whether the English speakers in the present study resolved their non-understanding or not depends on whether the non-understanding part was related to the task they

were doing or not. It depends on topic or content of the non-understanding part. For example, when M1 from Group E was talking about the Indonesian foods he likes, I4 did not understand a food M1 was talking about. But I4 did not resolve her non-understanding, just letting it pass with a backchannel because she thought that it was nothing related to their cooking activity, and her non-understanding would not hinder their cooking activity.

To sum up the findings in the present study, the English speakers in the study used *let it pass* to not make their interlocutor feel embarrassed because of an interruption, and to make their conversation flow smoothly. Therefore, they tried to arrive at their understanding by themselves and only when they could not arrive at understanding by themselves, they tried to resolve their non-understanding by using other communication strategies. There were also times when English speakers in the present study did not resolve their non-understanding because they thought that their non-understanding would not hinder accomplishing their assigned task.

5. Conclusion

Similar to Kirkpatrick's (2007b) observations, the participants in the present study used *let it pass* when they did not understand what their interlocutors had said, hoping that it would be clear later and also to avoid causing embarrassment. Among the *let it pass* users in the study, some used other communication strategies to resolve their non-understanding when they realized that their use of *let it pass* did not make them arrive at understanding. This is in line with Firth's (1996) discussion on the use of *let it pass*. Others did not try anything to arrive at understanding, but just *let it pass*. One reason behind their *let it pass* was that although they did not understand what their interlocuter had said, they knew what to do. Another reason was that the part *let it pass* was used for was not related to the task being done and the non-understanding could not hinder the communication.

In brief, while accomplishing the shared goal, each group in the present study used *let it pass* as a communication strategy to make their conversation flow smoothly while maintaining their politeness as long as their non-understanding of what their interlocutor has said did not affect accomplishing the shared goal. This finding leads to the conclusion that the use of *let it pass* systematically facilitates talk when English speakers from ASEAN countries communicate with each other in English. This should be noted by the English language learners who are potential ELF users, and they should know their own communication purposes.

The present study reflects what House (2012), and Lopriore and Vettorel (2015) have suggested, concerned with how ELF users deal with each other in real contexts. Also, the examples in the present study might to some extent contribute to learners and users of ELF in developing "intercultural competence in ELF" as House (2012, p. 200) suggests. According to Jenkins et al. (2011), English teachers should reflect the ELF research findings and take into account the significance of ELF in real-world situations. One of the examples is Kalocsai's (2009) findings concerning the favourabe attitude of younger English users of ELF, paying attention to arriving at shared understanding without concerning the mistakes they make. Kalocsai's finding is in line with Kirkpatrick's (2007a) argument for using pluralistic approach in English language teaching, paying less attention to language norms but more to communication strategies. This is something which can be explored through analyzing such strategies as *let it pass* in the classroom.

Till now, there has been not much literature on English spoken by ELF speakers from ASEAN countries, particularly very little research has been done on the use of the *let it pass* as a communication strategy. The findings in this present study may contribute some help for ELF learners and users not only from the ASEAN region but also from non-ASEAN regions. Although, it should be mentioned that the data in this study was collected in a specific social setting and if further data is collected in other settings like business or academic settings, participants' use of *let it pass* may be different and thus, findings may vary from those in this study.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A

Transcription conventions
The video-recorded materials were transcribed according to the following notation system which was an adapted version of Atkinson & Heritage (1984).

=	a continuous utterance, a continuing intonation
,	a continuing intonation
.	a stopping fall in tone
:	an extension of the sound or syllable it follows, more colons prolong the stretch
?	a rising inflection
!	an animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation
[	overlapping
wor-	a halt or cutoff, a word or clause not produced in its entirety
-word-	syllables of a word or strings of words to show stammering
((word))	a non-vocal action, description of conversational scene
word	non-English terms
XXXXX	inaudible sound or utterance

Appendix B

Extract 3

1	B1:	I don't remember it. Sometimes, that smell has: that smell
2		they told me that smell come from the plant.
3	T1:	Umm umm.
4	B1:	Vegetable one kind of vegetable. That has a lot of smell.
5	T1:	Onn.
6	B1:	In the:: You know. Right? At the night market,=
7	T1:	Hmm.
8	B1:	=there is a little hotpot.
9	T1:	Hotpot.
10	I1:	Hotpot. Yeah.
11	B1:	That hotpot has they gave us umm ahh the water glory, cabbage,
12		that-that kind of vegetable.
13	T1:	Yes.
14	B1:	I don't know the name.
15	T1:	That's I think it's a kind of celery.
16	B1:	Maybe.
17	T1:	That is the I think is=
18	I1:	Ah:
19	T1:	=*keun-chai*. They call it *keun-chai*.
20	B1:	Yes.
21	I1:	Not *phakchi*? ((laughs))
22	B1:	((laughs))
23	T1:	Not *phakchi*. Not *phakchi*.
24	I1:	((laughs))
25	B1:	((laughs))
26	T1:	*Phakchi*, *phakchi* is the the green one. *Chiangmai*.
27	I1:	Ah. Yes. Yes. Yes.
28	B1:	Yeah.
29	T1:	But, this one is like green.
30	B1:	Green. Yes. It looks like green and yeah I'm not sure the name.
31	T1:	Hmm hmm.
32	B1:	But, I don't like the smell that that that plant. And they add it.
33	T1:	They put it on the hotpot.
34	B1:	Yeah in the hot-
35	T1:	With the morning glory, pumpkin?
36	B1:	Yeah. The morning glory, pumpkin.
37	T1:	I think it's *keun-chai*.
38	I1:	Ah:::
39	B1:	Yeah. So when they add it, I don't want to eat. ((laughs))

Extract 4

1	I2:	And then after that, you can have umm like you need make you need
2		to fry some dough. So, like this dough, ((gesture of making dough))
3		you just put some flour, and mix it with water. And then, you put
4		some corn.
5	T2:	Some what?
6	I2:	Corn.
7	T2:	Corn?
8	I2:	Yeah. Corn.
9	T2:	Hmm hmm.
10	I2:	You know like they have it here in the can.
11	T2:	Ah: hmm.
12	I2:	Yeah just put it. ((gesture of putting corn into the dough))
13	T2:	Ah yes. OK.
14	I2:	And you can just cut ((gesture of cutting)) carrot.
15	T2:	Carrot.
16	I2:	Just like little-little piece and put it there as well. And mix it.
17		((gesture of putting carrot into the dough and mixing it))
18	T2:	Stir it. OK.
19	I2:	Just stir it. And you can put some salt, and pepper until it tastes good.
20	T2:	Umm. Ah: It's a kind of like umm I don't know ah: boil rice?
21		No. But, but it's powder rice? It's it's flour. It's not it's not rice.
22	I2:	Yea-
23	T2:	You boil it? You boil it?
24	I2:	No. No. Not not-
25	T2:	You fry? You fry?
26	I2:	Yeah. So, it's like: You make the dough. So, the dough consists of
27		water and flour.
28	T2:	Dough? Dough?
29	I2:	Dough. Yeah. Dough. Like you know pancake dough.
30	T2:	Ah: OK. OK.
31	I2:	It will be salty. So, you put the- ah you put water and flour.
32	T2:	Hmm.
33	I2:	It's not really like pancake. It's more like hmm hmm. If pancake,
34		it's like really ((gesture of pouring pancake dough from above)) how to say?
35	T2:	Sticky?
36	I2:	No. It's really liquid. It's not too liquid.
37	T2:	Umm OK.
38	I2:	It's a bit like sticky, but not so sticky. ((laughs))
39	T2:	((laughs)) I see. I see. OK. OK. I will try.
40	I2:	Yeah. So, like water, ah no no. Flour, water, pepper, salt. ((gesture of
41		making dough))
42	T2:	Hmm. ((nods))

Extract 6

1	I3:	So, first thing first. What we are going to do is you will start dicing
2		the garlic ((points at the garlic cloves)) in small into small piece.
3	C1:	OK. ((take garlic cloves and hold in the hand))
4	I3:	Ah.
5	C1:	Where is the cut? ((gesture of cutting))
6	I3:	You can use the- you can have a look there.
7	C1:	((goes to the dish drainer and looks up the knife among the utensils
8		put in it, then takes a knife and comes back to the table on which
9		a chopping board already placed by I3))
10	I3:	Yeah. I used to make it into the like a paste
11	C1:	((washes the chopping board))
12	I3:	with the garlic but since we don't have mortar and pestle here, so
13		we can just dice it up
14	C1:	((finishes washing and come back to the table))
15	I3:	into small pieces.
16	C1:	((starts peeling the garlic cloves))
17	I3:	I'll check the oil. ((murmurs))
18	C1:	((finishes peeling the garlic cloves)) Do you have a bigger knife?
19		((holds the knife being used)) Not this one.
20	I3:	The bigger one is not as sharp as this one.
21	C1:	OK. ((starts mashing the garlic by putting the knife on each garlic clove
22		and pressing the knife with his palm heel))
23	I3:	But if you want, you can try.
24	C1:	((goes to the dish drainer and finds the bigger knife)) Where is it?
25	I3:	It's there.
26	C1:	((looks up a bigger knife in the dish drainer but finds only a small one)) No.
27	I3:	It's not there?
28	C1:	Yeah. Yeah. I saw it. This one. ((takes the knife to the table)) OK. ((looks
29		at the knife carefully)) It's not sharp. ((continues using the knife which
30		was used at the beginning, then starts chopping the garlic)) Is it enough?