
Editorial

A Lingua Franca Controversy that Stalled the Ceremonial Test Flight of the Supersonic Concorde

Concorde was a turbojet supersonic passenger jet that was jointly developed and manufactured by Aérospatiale and the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) under an Anglo-French treaty. It had a maximum speed of over twice the speed of sound at Mach 2.04 (1354 miles per hour at cruise altitude), and could seat 92 to 128 passengers.

Significantly, the present writer, who was in Britain during the late 1960's following postgraduate studies, was aware of this marvelous development about which both Britain and France were proud to showcase frequently on the electronic media. Nevertheless, when it came to the stage of the ceremonial inaugural test flight in 1967, a major controversy erupted on nomenclature.

Concorde's name meaning harmony or union, reflected the cooperation on this project between United Kingdom and France.

The French authorities agreed that it would not be appropriate to call the Anglo-French aircraft "Super – Caravellé". It was concerned that the name for the aircraft should reflect the same meaning in both languages, and if possible the same spelling.

Consequently, the British Aircraft Corporation suggested Concorde (with and without the final "e"). Other possibilities such as 'Alliance' and 'Europa' were also suggested.

On the other hand, when the British Cabinet of Ministers had earlier approved the project in principle, had declared that the aircraft should be called 'Concord' (English spelling without the 'e').

However, on the eve of the ceremonial test flight, controversy raged over the spelling. There was a concern that, if the French spelling (Concorde) was adopted, the common assumption would be that the aircraft was primarily French in origin. During this early post – colonial era, there was also a tendency among French speaking countries to reject the idea of the English Language being regarded as a global language.

The argument continued until the then British Minister of Technology Tony Benn, resolved it in 1968 in favour of the word Concorde spelt with the 'e', bringing to a close the controversy over the nomenclature, and thus peacefully facilitating the ceremonial test flight.

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