

The effect of language revitalisation initiatives on the rate of decline of Gaelic



OILTHIGH
OBAR DHEATHAIN

Ingeborg Birnie, University of Aberdeen
r01iab13@abdn.ac.uk



Background Information

- Language shift has caused a decline in the number of Gaelic speakers
- From the 1980s onwards various language revitalisation initiatives have been established to strengthen the position of the language
- Institutionalisation and professionalisation of the language revitalisation strategies after the Gaelic language (2005) Act.

Research question

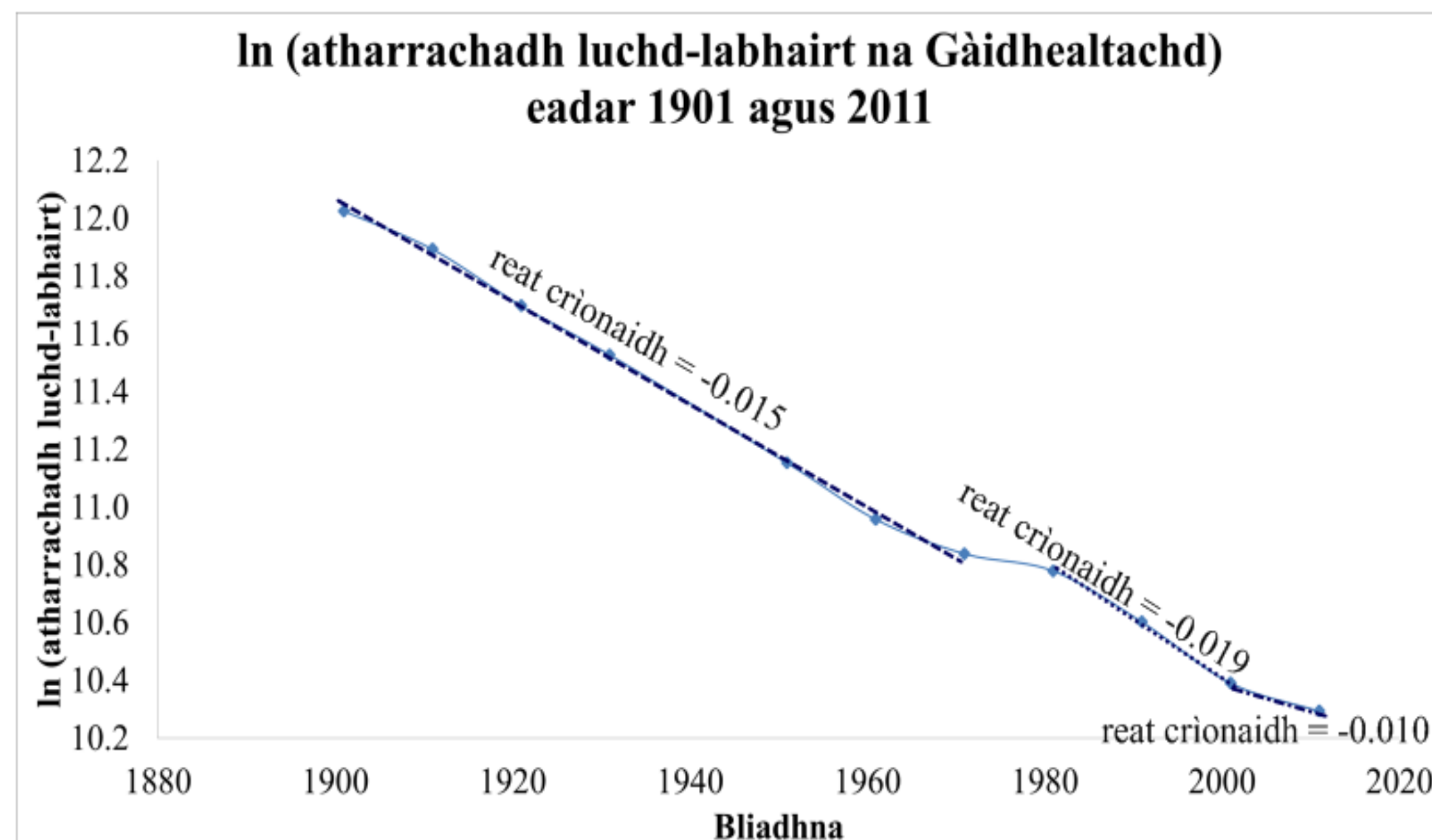
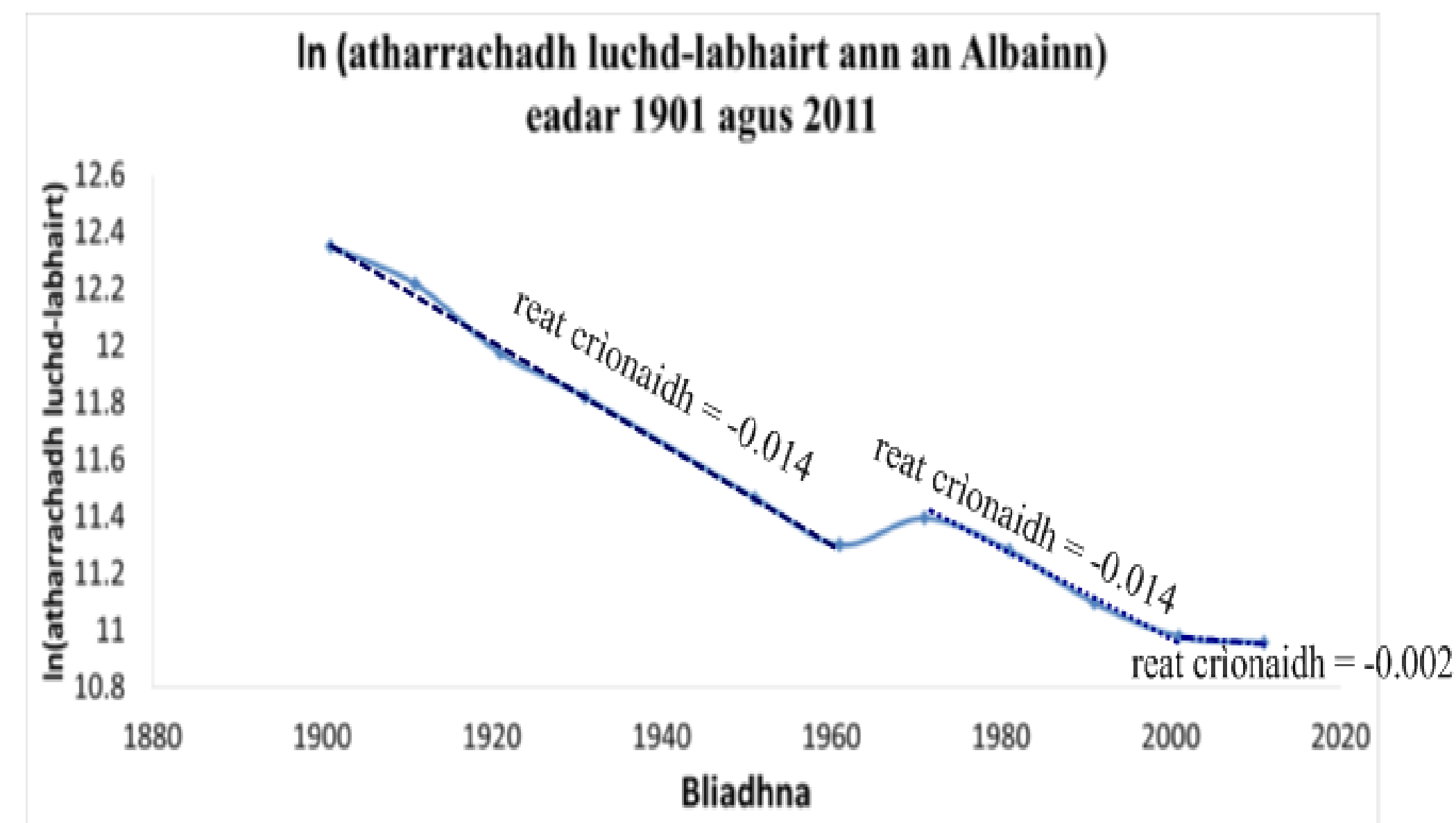
What has been the effect of the revitalisation initiatives from the 1980s onwards on the rate of decline of Gaelic?

Research methodology

- The creation of a mathematical model to establish the rate of decline of Gaelic
- Comparison of the rate of decline between 1901 and 1981 and 1981 onwards
- Comparison between Scotland as a whole and the Gàidhealtachd

The Gàidhealtachd is taken to comprise Argyll and Bute, the Western Isles and the Highland Council area.
It should be noted that the census question changed from 'do you speak Gaelic' (1901 onwards) to the more ambiguous 'can you speak Gaelic' from 1971 onwards.

Results



Notes

- The rate of decline remained the same for Scotland as a whole between 1901 and 2001
- Rate of decline in the Gàidhealtachd increased between 1981 and 2001
- Between 2001 and 2011 the rate of decline in the Gàidhealtachd decreased
- The overall decrease in the rate of decline would appear to be caused by an increase in Gaelic speakers in the Galltachd (those areas not covered by the Gàidhealtachd).

Conclusion

Although the number of Gaelic speakers is still in decline, it would appear that the rate of decline in the Gàidhealtachd initially increased after the start of the revitalisation initiatives.

The rate of decline has decreased since 2001, especially in the Galltachd.

References

- General Registrar of Scotland 2005, *Scotland's census 2001 Gaelic Report*
- MacKinnon, K. 2003, Gaelic in the census 1881 to 2001 *Table 2: Gaelic speakers 1881 - 2001.*
- McLeod, W. 2010, "Poileasaidh Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig: Paradaim Ùr" in *Coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig an-diugh / Gaelic Communities Today*, eds. G. Munro & I. Mac an Tàilleir, Dunedin Academic Press, Edinburgh, pp. 1-18
- National Records of Scotland 2013, *Table QS211SC Gaelic Language Skills*, HMSO, Edinburgh