Using participles

Participles are very common in (almost?) all dialects of spoken Arabic and being able to use them and understand them accurately is a pretty key skill for a learner. Unfortunately, their usage is a bit complex. Although often teachers seem keen on equating them to the English continuous, sticking to this terrible oversimplification will mess up your Arabic.

Almost all verbs have an active participle, and roughly speaking they can be divided up based on meaning into two groups: continuous participles and 'resultative' participles. Continuous participles express an ongoing action (قادر *2aader* 'able to', رايح *raaye7* 'going') with similar meaning to the English continuous or to the present with *3am*. Resultative participles express the state resulting from the action of the verb, of 'having done' the verb (كاتب *kaateb* 'having written', متخرج *mətkharrej* 'having graduated'), and often have similar meaning to the English present perfect.

Which meaning a participle will have is generally predictable from the verb. In this section I'll present a rough guide to the different types of verb and participle – and cases where both meanings are possible. Do remember though that there are some verbs without participles and that some participles have unexpected meanings – as with everything else a 100% command of participles can only come with lots of exposure to natives.

Derivation

In Shami participle derivation is mostly similar to fuSHa. With form I verbs, however, there is some variation which is not predictable from the normal fuSHa-Shami sound correspondences. The following table shows the masculine singular active and passive participle forms of the different kinds of form I verbs:

Form I participles

Verb	Active Participle	Passive Participle
كتب *katab* 'write' (sound)	كاتب *kaateb*	مكتوب *maktuub*
اخد *2akhad* 'take' (hamzated)	آخد *2aakhed* (S/L) ماخد *maakhed* (J/P)	مأخود *ma2khuud*
وصل *wəSel* 'arrive' (assimilating)	واصل *waaSel*	موصول *mawSuul*
باع *baa3* 'sell' (hollow)	بايع *baaye3*	مبيوع *mabyuu3*
حس *7ass* 'feel' (doubled)	حاسس *7aases* حاسّ *7aass*	محسوس *ma7suus*
طفى *Tafa* 'turn off' (defective)	طافي *Taafi*	مطفي *məTfi* (S/L)? مطفي *maTfi* (J/P)

تعب *təʒ3eb/ti3eb* 'get tired' (sound)	تعبان *ta3baan*	N/A
سكر *səker/siker* 'get drunk' (sound)	سكران *səkraan*	N/A
غار *ghaar* 'be jealous' (hollow)	غيران *gheeraan*	مغيور *maghyuur*
جاع *jaa3* 'get hungry' (hollow)	جوعان *joo3aan*	N/A
غلي *ghəli/ghili* 'become expensive' (defective)	غليان *ghalyaan*	N/A

As you can see, as far as passive participles are concerned the differences from fuSHa are fairly minimal and limited to two cases:

- Hollow verbs, where the pattern is regularised to fall in line with the *maf3uul* pattern used elsewhere – producing *mabyuu3* (rather than fuSHa مباع *mubaa3*). You might see this regularisation in MSA, too.
- Defective verbs, where in Syrian and Lebanese (but not Jordanian and Palestinian) the vowel in the prefix (*mə-*) is different from fuSHa (*ma-*). Of course, all of the fuSHa complications relating to *tanwiin* and so on in these forms (in fuSHa this form would be مطفٍ *maTfin* in nominative and genitive for example) can also safely be ignored.

With active participles, the situation is more complicated, because Shami has two basic patterns for form I active participles – *faa3el* and *fa3laan* – rather than the one (*faa3il*) typically used in fuSHa. For participles formed with *faa3el* the differences are again limited:

- The hamza in hollow verbs (e.g. fuSHa بائع *baa2i3*) is predictably replaced with a *yaa2* (بايع *baaye3*).
- Doubled verbs' participles are (for some speakers) regularised – حاسس *7aases* rather than fuSHa *7aass* (حاسّ).
- The initial hamze in the two hamzated verbs أخد *2akhad* 'take' and أكل *2akal* 'eat' is replaced with an *m-* in Jordanian and Palestinian (*maakhed, maakel*).

However, verbs formed with *fa3laan* (or for some irregular verbs, like *səker*, *fə3laan*) have a completely different pattern, albeit one with fairly predictable variations:

- Hollow verbs' participles are either *feelaan* (e.g. غيران *gheeraan*) or *foolaan* (جوعان *joo3aan*) – depending on whether the middle letter of the root is *w* or *y*.[1]
- Defective verbs' participles are formed on *fa3yaan* (e.g. غليان *ghalyaan*), with no variation depending on the final underlying letter.[2]

Whether a verb has a *faa3el* or a *fa3laan* participle is generally unpredictable and subject to quite a lot of regional variation. Many verbs of becoming – تعب *təʒ3eb* 'get tired', غلي *ghəli* 'get more

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[1] Note though that different speakers might consider the root to be different. The forms جوعان *joo3aan* and جيعان *jee3aan* both exist in different regions, for example.

[2] This lines up with the swallowing-up of final-*u* defective verbs (e.g. يغلو) into the final-*i* and final-*a* categories.

expensive', جاع *jaa3* 'get hungry' – have *fa3laan* participles everywhere, and it is mostly intransitive verbs that have *fa3laan* participles across the Levantine area. But in Syria in particular, *fa3laan* forms have extended much further. Participles like وصلان *waSlaan*, شربان *sharbaan* and حكيان *7akyaan* are characteristic of Syria.

Outside form I active and passive participles are formed straightforwardly along the same lines as fuSHa, with two exceptions:

- The prefix, rather than the fuSHa *mu-*, is either *m-* (before a single consonant) or *mə-* (before a consonant cluster): مترجم *mtarjem*, متعلم *mət3allem*.
- As with form I, defective active participles pose none of the *tanwiin* problems they pose in fuSHa: the participle of خلى *khalla* is always مخلي *mkhalli* (not *mukhallin* etc).

Feminine and plural forms

Like adjectives, participles have feminine and plural forms. Unlike some adjectives, participles' feminines and plurals are formed exclusively with *taa2 marbuuTa* (*-a/e*) and ين- *-iin*. The variety of different shapes of form I participles mean they require some special treatment, but they are basically predictable. Have a look at the forms of the active participles we've already seen above:

Form I Active Participles

Verb	Masculine	Feminine	Plural
كتب *katab* 'write' (sound)	كاتب *kaateb*	كاتبة *kaatbe*	كاتبين *kaatbiin*
اخد *2akhad* 'take' (hamzated)	آخد *2aakhed* (S/L) ماخد *maakhed* (J/P)	آخدة *2aakhde* (S/L) ماخدة *maakhde* (J/P)	آخدين *2aakhdiin* (S/L) ماخدين *maakhdiin* (J/P)
وصل *wəSel* 'arrive' (assimilating)	واصل *waaSel*	واصلة *waaSle*	واصلين *waaSliin*
باع *baa3* 'sell' (hollow)	بايع *baaye3*	بايعة *baay3a*	بايعين *baay3iin*
طفى *Tafa* 'turn off' (defective)	طافي *Taafi*	طافية *Taafye*	طافيين *Taafyiin*
حس *7ass* 'feel' (doubled)	حاسس *7aases* حاس *7aass*	حاسة *7aasse*	حاسين *7aassiin*
تعب *təiab/ti3eb* 'get tired' (sound)	تعبان *ta3baan*	تعبانة *ta3baane*	تعبينين *ta3baaniin* (S/L) *ta3baniin* (J/P)

سكر sǝker/siker 'get drunk' (sound)	سكران sǝkraan (S/L) sikraan (J/P)	سكرانة sǝkraane (S/L) sikraan (J/P)	سكرانين sǝkraaniin (S/L) sikraniin (J/P)
غار ghaar 'be jealous' (hollow)	غيران gheeraan (S/L) gheraan (J/P)	غيرانة gheeraane (S/L) gheraane (J/P)	غيرانين gheeraaniin (S/L) gheraniin (J/P)
جاع jaa3 'get hungry' (hollow)	جوعان joo3aan (S/L) jo3aan (J/P)	جوعانة joo3aane (S/L) jo3aane (J/P)	جوعانين joo3aaniin (S/L) jo3aniin (J/P)
غلي ghǝli/ghili 'become expensive' (defective)	غليان ghalyaan	غليانة ghalyaane	غليانين ghalyaaniin (S/L) ghalyaniin (J/P)

The *fa3laan* forms are entirely stable and present no problems at all. The *faa3el* forms are slightly more complicated, but predictably so – they have the normal dropping of the short unstressed *e* vowel when the suffix is added. Note the common (and fuSHa-like) spelling change in doubled verbs, and the transformation of *-i* into *-ye* and *-yiin* in defective verbs.

Passive participles are even more straightforward. Since all participles have the same shape (*maf3uul*) except defective verbs, we'll restrict ourselves to three examples:

Form I Passive Participles

Verb	Masculine	Feminine	Plural
كتب katab 'write' (sound)	مكتوب maktuub	مكتوبة maktuube	مكتوبين maktuubiin (S/L) maktubiin (J/P)
باع baa3 'sell' (hollow)	مبيوع mabyuu3	مبيوعة mabyuu3a	مبيوعين mabyuu3iin (S/L) mabyu3iin (J/P)
طفى Tafa 'turn off' (defective)	مطفي mǝTfi (S/L) maTfi (J/P)	مطفية mǝTfiyye (S/L) maTfiyye (J/P)	مطفيين mǝTfiyyiin (S/L) maTfiyyiin (J/P)

As you can see, in the *maf3uul* forms suffixation is very straightforward. The only oddity here is that the *-i* in defective forms, rather than becoming *-ye*, becomes *-iyye* as if it was a *nisbe* adjective.

Sound verbs of other forms show similar behaviour to the form Is, dropping short unstressed *e* when suffixes are added – although not short unstressed *a*, which keeps the passive and active participles distinct in pronunciation even if they're written the same.

Sound Participles (Forms II-X)

Verb	Masculine	Feminine	Plural
علم 3allam 'teach' (II, sound)	معلم m3allem معلم m3allam	معلمة m3allme معلمة m3allame	معلمين m3allmiin معلمين m3allamiin
وافق waafa2 'agree' (III, sound)	موافق mwaafe2 موافق mwaafa2	موافقة mwaaf2a موافقة mwaafa2a	موافقين mwaaf2iin موافقين mwaafa2iin

Verb	Masculine	Feminine	Plural
تعلم t3allam 'learn' (V, sound)	متعلم mət3allem	متعلم mət3allme	متعلم mət3allmiin
توافق twaafa2 'agree' (VI, sound)	متوافق mətwaafe2	متوافقة mətwaaf2a	متوافقين mətwaaf2iin
انضرب nDarab 'be hit' (VII, sound)	محمر mə7mərr	محمرة mə7mərra	محمرين mə7mərriin
افترض ftaraD 'assume' (VIII, sound)	مفترض məftəreD مفترض məftəraD	مفترضة məftərDa مفترضة məftəraDa	مفترضين məftərDiin مفترضين məftəraDiin
احمرّ 7marr 'turn red' (IX, sound)	محمر mə7mərr	محمرة mə7mərra	محمرين mə7mərriin
استغرب staghrab 'find strange' (X, sound)	مستغرب məstəghreb مستغرب məstəghrab	مستغربة məstəgh@rbe مستغربة məstəghrabe	مستغربين məstəgh@rbiin مستغربين məstəghrabiin

Defective participles are also slightly more complicated, but follow the same basic principle:

Defective participles (Forms II-X)

Verb	Masculine	Feminine	Plural
خبى khabba 'hide' (II, defective)	مخبي mkhabbi مخبى mkhabba	مخبية mkhabbye مخباية mkhabbaaye	مخبيين mkhabbyiin مخبايين mkhabbaayiin
حاكى 7aaka 'speak to' (III, defective)	محاكي m7aaki محاكا m7aaka	محاكية m7aakye محاكاية m7aakaaye	محاكيين m7aakyiin محاكايين m7aakaayiin
تخبى tkhabba 'be hidden' (V, defective)	متخبي mətkhabbi	متخبية mətkhabbye	متخبيين mətkhabbyiin
تحاكى t7aaka 'speak to' (VI, defective)	متحاكي mət7aaki	متحاكية mət7aakye	متحاكية mət7aakyiin
انشرى nshara 'be bought' (VII, defective)	منشري mənshəri	منشرية mənshərye	منشريين mənshəryiin
استوى stawa 'be done' (VIII, defective)	مستوي məstəwi	مستوي məstəwye	مستويين məstəwyiin
استرجى starja 'dare' (X, defective)	مسترجي məstarji	مسترجية məstarjye	مسترجيين məstarjyiin

The active participles all end in -i, which becomes -ye and -yiin when the feminine and plural suffixes are added – just like the form I pattern faa3i. The passives, meanwhile, end with -a as we would expect from fuSHa. However, when suffixes are added to the feminine forms, a -y- is inserted (rather than dropping the -a as would happen in fuSHa).

Object pronouns

Paticiples can take object and indirect object pronouns just like other verbal forms. For masculine and plural forms, direct object pronouns trigger the expected vowel and stress changes straightforwardly (depending on whether the pronoun begins with a consonant or a vowel):

كاتب _kaateb_	كاتبو _kaatb-o_	كاتبها _kaatəb-ha_
كاتبين _kaatbiin_	كاتبينو _kaatbiin-o_	كاتبينها _kaatbiin-ha_
مساوي _msaawi_ (S/L)	مساويه _msaawii-(h)_ (S/L)	مساويها _msaawii-ha_ (S/L)

Indirect object pronouns (-_l_- pronouns) similarly have the expected effects, including the shortening of long vowels (which normal object pronouns do not do).

مسموح _masmuu7_	مسمحلو _masmə7-lo_ (S/L) _masmu7-lo_ (J/P)	مسموحلنا _masma7-əlna_ (S/L) _masmu7-ilna_ (J/P)
ضاربين _Daarbiin_	ضاربينلك _Daarbən-lak_ (S/L) _Daarbin-lak_ (J/P)	ضاربينلنا _Daarbən-əlna_ (S/L) _Daarbin-ilna_ (J/P)

The feminine forms are slightly more complicated. For many speakers, the dropping of the _e_ in sound active participles (e.g. _kaateb > kaatbe, m3allem > m3allme_) is reversed when pronouns beginning with vowels are added. Other speakers deal with the awkwardness of reversing sound change by lengthening and stressing the vowel of the _taa2 marbuuTa_. A final group of speakers – mainly southern Levantine – resolve the entire problem by replacing the _taa marbuuTa_ with a final long -_aa_-. The following examples show the three strategies:

كاتبة _kaatbe_	1) كاتبتو _kaatəbt-o_ (S/L) _kaatibt-o_ (J/P) 2) كاتبيتو _kaatbiit-o_ 3) كاتباه _kaatbaa-(h)_	كاتبتها _kaatbat-ha_ (S/L) _kaatibt-ha_ (J/P) كاتبتها _kaatbiit-ha_ كاتباها _kaatbaa-ha_
معلمة _m3allme_	1) معلمتو _m3alləmt-o_ (S/L) _m3allimt-o_ (J/P) 2) معلميتو _m3allmiit-o_ 3) معلماه _m3allmaa-(h)_	معلمتها _m3allmat-ha_ (S/L) _m3allimt-ha_ (J/P) معلمتها _m3allmiit-ha_ معلماها _m3allmaa-ha_
مساوية _msaawye_	1) مساويتو _msaawiit-o_ 2) مساويتو _msaawiit-o_ 3) مساوياه _msaawyaa-(h)_	مساويتها _msaaw(y)ət-ha_ (S/L) _msaaw(y)it-ha_ (J/P) مساويتها _msaaw(y)iit-ha_ مساوياها _msaaw(y)aa-ha_

The most common solution in Syrian is (1), but the other two are also both common throughout the Levantine area and you will probably hear all three.

Feminine participles with attached pronouns also – unlike in fuSHa, and unlike any other participle form – distinguish person. The forms given above as examples work for a non-second person subject. However, when the subject of a participle is second person singular feminine _inti_, a long -_ii_- is inserted between the -_t_ of the _taa marbuuTa_ and the pronoun:

كاتبة	_kaatbe_	كاتبتيه _kaatəbtii-(h)_ ^(S/L)	كاتبتيها _kaatəbtii-ha_ ^(S/L)
		kaatibtii-(h) ^(J/P)	_kaatibtii-ha_ ^(J/P)
عرفانة	_3arfaane_ ^(S)	عرفانتيه _3arfaantii-h_ ^(S)	عرفانتيها _3arfaantii-ha_ ^(S)
معلمة	_m3allme_	معلمتيلك _m3alləmtii-lek_ ^(S/L)	معلمتيلها _m3alləmtii-la_ ^(S/L)
		m3allimtii-lek ^(J/P)	معلمتيلها _m3allimtii-lha_ ^(J/P)

Here are some examples:

ليش عاملة حالك مو عرفانتيني؟
leesh 3aamle 7aalek muu 3arfaantiini? ^(S)
Why are you pretending you [= feminine singular] don't know me?

كم معلقة سكر حاططتيلا؟
kamm ma3la2et səkkar 7aaTəTTiila? ^(L)
How many sugars [= spoons of sugar] did you put in it?

Usage

Active participles especially are very common in colloquial. The use you've probably encountered if you have any familiarity with any dialect at all is with certain verbs of motion. For these, the participle is often used in a continuous meaning:

وين رايح؟
ween **raaye7**?
Where are you **going**?

ماشيين
**maashyiin**
we're **leaving**

This can of course be used in a future sense similar to the English continuous:

نازل هون؟
**naazel** hoon?
are you **getting off** [the bus] here?

This continuous sense also appears with a limited number of other verbs, primarily verbs of sensation, thought etc:

يلي شجع منتخب النظام خلال المباريات الأخيرة **معتبر** انو السياسة مالها علاقة بالرياضة
yalli shajja3 muntakhab ᵊnniZaam khilaal ᵊlmubaarayaat ᵊl2akhiira **məʒtaber** 2ənno ssiyaase maala 3alaa2a bi-rriyaaDa
The people [= the one who] who supported the regime's team in the last few matches **believe** that politics has nothing to do with sport

حاسس حالي مرضان شوي
**7aases** 7aali marDaan ᵊshweyy
I **feel** [= am feeling myself] a bit ill

مالي **سمعانة**
*maali **sam3aane***
I can't **hear** [you][3]

ناطر تليفونك اه؟
***naaTer** telefoonak aah?*
I'll be [= I'm] **waiting** for you to call [= your phone call], OK?

مستنيك
mistanniik
I'm **waiting for** you

With most verbs, however, the participle has the sense of completion of an action often lining up with the English present perfect. This is easiest to show with verbs of becoming. You probably already know تعب *tə3eb* 'get tired' and its participle تعبان *ta3baan* 'tired'. Another good example is طول *Təwel* 'get long, tall' and its causative equivalent *Tawwal* 'lengthen, let grow longer', whose participles contrast with simple طويل 'long, tall':

دقنك **طولان**
*da2nak **Toolaan***
your beard has **got longer/is longer**

مطول دقنك
***mTawwel** da2nak*
you've **grown** your beard **out/let** it **grow longer**

There are some verbs which typically have a 'becoming' sense in colloquial which are not necessarily used in the same way in fuSHa. لبس *ləbes* for example in colloquial means 'get dressed' or with an object 'put on'. بلبس *bəlbes* means 'I get dressed' or 'I put on' or 'I wear' in a habitual sense. It doesn't mean 'I'm wearing' – for that you need *laabes*. Contrast the two forms below:

متل للي كل السنة **بيلبس** ملوّن وبعاشورا بتلاقيه **لابس** أسود
*mətl əlli kəll əssəne **byəlbes** ᵊmlawwan w b3aashuura bətlaa2ii **laabes** 2aswad*
Like someone who **wears/puts on** coloured [clothes] the whole year then in Ashoura you'll find him **wearing/having put on** black

The same applies to نام *naam*, which usually means 'go to sleep' (thus نايم is sleeping and بنام means 'I go to sleep' and not 'I'm sleeping'), سكن *sakan*, which usually means 'take up residence' (thus ساكن is 'living'), and many others.

The sense of completion, however, is not restricted to verbs of becoming or intransitive verbs. Do not mistake forms like كاتب, دارس etc for 'writing', 'studying'. This will confuse your understanding and, if you use them that way, the meaning you're trying to put across! Most verbs have a participle expressing completed action, the result of the action expressed by the equivalent verb, which in many cases can be most idiomatically translated with the English present perfect:

سمعت انو **فاتح** محامي
*smə3ᵊt 2ənno **faate7** mu7aami* [S]
I heard he**'s opened** a lawyer['s practice]

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[3] Though as you can see from the examples below, we could also see this as a participle of completion/result.

كاتبلك كل شي ع الورقة
***keetəb**lak kəll shi 3a-lwara2a* (L)
I**'ve written** everything **down** for you on the piece of paper

ماحد بعرف بعدين شو رح يصير اكيد الله **كاتبلك** إشي احسن وافضل
*maa 7ad bi3raf ba3deen shuu ra7 ySiir 2akiid aLLa **kaatib**lak 2ishi 2a7san w 2afDal* (J)
Nobody knows what's going to happen, God's definitely **got** something better **planned** for you [= **has written** for you]

يلي الله **رازقه** صوت حلو بيقدر يغني ويعبر عن نفسه من خلاله
*yalli 2aLLa **raaz2**o Soot 7ilw bi2der yghanni w y3abber 3an nafso min khilaalo* (P)
[People] who God **has blessed** with nice voices can sing and express themselves with them...

اهداء لكل شخص **فاقد** شخص
*2ihdaa2 lakull shakhᵊS **faa2ed** shakhᵊS* (S)
Dedicated [= a dedication] to everybody who**'s lost** somebody

صرلو خمس سنين **موقف** شغل بالمشروع مشان الناس تمل وتبيع
*Sallo khams ᵊsniin ᵊ**mwa22ef** shəghᵊl bilmashruu3* (S)
It's been five years since he stopped work on the project [= he's been **in a state of having stopped** work on the project for five years][4]

انتي ليش **مكبرة** القصة؟
*2inti leesh ᵊ**mkabbra** l2əSSa?* (S)
Why're you making this into a big thing [= why **have you made** the story **big**?]

With some verbs of sense there are cases which are debatable one way or the other – does عرفان *3arfaan* represent a continuous equivalent to بعرف 'I know', or does it express the result of عرفت 'I found out'? Either way, it expresses a state of knowing. In cases like the one below, these verbs have a definite completed action:

الاستاذ يظهر مو **سمعان** بهاد الحديث
*ᵊl2əstaaz yaZhor⁵ muu **sam3aan** b-haad ᵊl7adiis* (S)
It seems that sir **has** not **heard** of this hadith

Confusingly, even verbs of motion can have this sense. We saw رايح above in a continuous meaning, but it can also mean 'have been', depending on the context:

رايح شي على المانيا؟
***raaye7** shi 3ala 2almaanya?* (S)
have you ever **been** to Germany?

قديش صارلكون **طالعين** من الحارة
*2addeesh Sallkon **Taal3iin** mn ᵊl7aara?* (S)
how long has it been since you left the neighbourhood [= how long has it become for you **having left** the neighbourhood?]

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[4] صارلو and its other pronominal forms is usually used for 'he's been... for Y years' and is often combined with an adjective but the combination of this and a participle (which carries the force of 'having stopped') makes it awkward to translate this even halfway literally into English.

[5] يظهر is a fixed fuSHa form used in colloquial in a way syntactically identical to شكلو *sheklo* 'it seems that'.

Participles can also be used in an emphatic future sense stressing the certainty (or impossibility) of an action:

اي من هلق **موقع** عليه
*2ee mən halla2 **mwaqqe3** 3alee*
consider it signed [from now I've signed it]

ماني **باعتة** حدا لعندك
*maani **baa3te** 7ada la3əndak*
I'm not **sending** anyone to your house! (depending on context this could also be 'I haven't sent…')

مش **حاكي** عن الموضوع خلص
*mish **7aaki** 3an ᵊlmawDuu3 khalaS!*
I'm not **talking** about it [= the issue], forget it!

انا فشخة برات هالبيت ماني **فاشخة**
*2ana fashkha barraat halbeet maani **faashkha***
I'm not taking a single step [= a step I'm not **stepping**] outside this house!

Participles and nouns-from-participles

Some participles proper (i.e. parts of the verbal paradigm) are also nouns with a distinct meaning – كاتب *kaateb* and طالب *Taaleb* can either be participles 'having written' and 'asked for' or nouns meaning 'writer' or 'student'. These are obviously etymologically derived from the participles, but they're distinct in meaning and often have their own broken plurals (*kəttaab* and *Təllaab* in these cases) which do not work for the plurals of the participles. They also form *iDaafe* with their objects rather than taking direct objects normally:

هي **كاتبة** لكتاب
*hiyye **kaatbet** ləktaab*
she's the **author** of the book

Participles, on the other hand, do not form an iDaafe with their objects:

انا **كاتبة** رسالة
*ana **kaatbe** risaale*
I've **written** a letter

There are a number of cases with non-form I verbs where rather than using the colloquial participle, the noun equivalent is taken from fuSHa and has *mu-* instead (although in Arabic script they are indistinguishable):

مدرب **mu**darreb coach, **m**darreb having trained (someone)

مفوض **mu**fawwaD commissioner / **m**fawwaD (having been) commissioned

These are distinct. To use *mdarreb* for 'coach' (or, for that matter, *mudarreb* for 'having trained') is incorrect.