
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Active Participles in Bisha Colloquial Arabic

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ABSTRACT

Active participles have been extensively studied across various languages and some Arabic dialects; however, their specific characteristics in Bisha Colloquial Arabic (BCA) remain unexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive description of active participles in BCA, focusing on their morphological and syntactic features. Data were collected from two primary sources: classroom interactions involving undergraduate students and content from social media platforms. These sources provided rich examples of active participle usage in diverse contexts. The analysis identified and categorized active participles into three main types: nominal, deverbal, and adjectival. The analysis revealed distinct characteristics for each type of participle. Nominal participles exhibit fully nominal properties, such as forming construct states, accepting adjectival modification, and functioning as noun phrases. Deverbal participles retain verbal traits, including aspectual marking, argument structure, and adverbial modification, closely mirroring their corresponding verbs. Adjectival participles, by contrast, function as standard adjectives, agreeing in gender, number, and definiteness with the nouns they modify. Additionally, BCA participles follow the *faʿil* morphological template, aligning with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in their derivation. However, BCA diverges from MSA by simplifying agreement rules for gender, number, and definiteness, prioritizing ease of communication. Despite these differences, BCA participles retain several features common to MSA and other Arabic dialects, particularly those of southern Saudi Arabia. This study demonstrates that active participles in BCA display a dynamic interplay of nominal and verbal characteristics, offering a unique linguistic balance. The findings contribute valuable insights into the structure and flexibility of active participles across Arabic varieties.

KEYWORDS

Bisha Colloquial Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Arabic dialects, active participles, nominal, deverbal, adjectival

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1. Introduction

Bisha Colloquial Arabic (BCA) is a dialect primarily spoken in the southwestern region of Saudi Arabia, particularly in the Asir province. This region encompasses urban centers such as Abha, Khamis Mushait, and Bisha, along with smaller towns like Sabt Al-Ayah, Al-Namas, and Tanawimuh. The area is home to a diverse population that includes urban residents, Bedouins, Tahaamis, and farmers. The focus of this study is on the urban variety of BCA spoken in Bisha, with the author being a native speaker of the dialect. BCA belongs to the broader group of southern dialects spoken across Saudi Arabia. Despite its linguistic significance and the cultural richness of the region, BCA remains largely understudied, especially in the context of active participle forms. To the best of our knowledge, no previous research has specifically addressed active participle forms in BCA. This gap in the literature serves as a key motivation for the current study. The research aims to offer a detailed syntactic description of active participles in Bisha Colloquial Arabic (BCA), with a particular focus on their categorial characteristics. By addressing this understudied aspect, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the grammatical structure and linguistic features of BCA, enriching the broader field of Arabic dialectology.

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1.1 Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

- 1) *What are the different morphological types of active participles in Bisha Colloquial Arabic (BCA)?*
- 2) *What are the syntactic properties of active participles in BCA?*
- 3) *To what extent do active participles in BCA resemble their equivalents in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and other Arabic dialects?*

By answering these questions, the research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on Arabic dialects and offer new insights into the syntactic behavior of active participles in BCA. This study holds particular significance for students of linguistics and translation, as it enhances their understanding of active participles within spoken Arabic dialects. The classification of active participles into distinct types, each with unique properties, provides a structured framework for analyzing and interpreting these forms in spoken language. This approach not only helps in differentiating between various active participles but also sheds light on their nuanced uses and meanings across dialectal contexts. As a result, students and researchers gain a sharper analytical perspective, enabling them to identify and translate these forms with greater accuracy. Ultimately, this research fosters improved linguistic competence and translation skills, bridging gaps between spoken and formal Arabic varieties.

2. Literature Review

The study of participles, particularly agentive nominalizations, has been central to linguistic inquiry for several decades. Participles represent a type of mixed category that straddles the boundaries between nominal and verbal elements, making them a critical point of analysis in both Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) and Government and Binding Theory. Foundational works in this area include Grimshaw (1990), Rappaport and Levin (1992), Roy and Soare (2012, 2014), and most recent contributions by Van Eynde (2021), Spyropoulos (2023) and Mensching & Remberger (2024). These studies provide a framework for understanding the dual properties of participles and their syntactic indeterminacy. Within Arabic linguistics, research on participles has primarily focused on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and major dialects. For example, Mohaidat (2017) examined the morphology of participles in a rural Palestinian dialect, while Hallman (2017) explored their semantics in contemporary Syrian Arabic. More recently, Almalky (2021) has provided an analysis of participles in Hijazi Arabic. However, despite these valuable contributions, participles in Bisha Arabic remain understudied. Agentive nominalizations, particularly participles, have been a focal point of linguistic research across multiple languages. These nominal forms, which often carry both verbal and nominal properties, represent a significant area of interest in understanding mixed categories in linguistic theory. This review synthesizes key studies on participles, particularly agentive nominalizations, across languages including English, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Arabic dialects, and other languages. It further contextualizes these findings within the broader theoretical frameworks that have shaped the understanding of mixed categories, event structure, and argument realization in nominalizations.

2.1 Agentive Nominalizations in English and Other Languages

Research on mixed categories, including participles, has played a crucial role in the development of linguistic theory over the past few decades. Notably, Grimshaw (1990), Rappaport and Levin (1992), and Roy and Soare (2012) have contributed significantly to understanding the interaction between verbal and nominal properties in participles. Grimshaw's (1990) seminal work on nominalizations in English introduced the notion that derived nominals do not form a homogenous class. Instead, Grimshaw (1990) proposed a classification of deverbal nominalizations into three types: complex event nominals, result nominals, and simple event nominals. This distinction is based on the correlation between event structure and argument realization within the nominalization. Grimshaw's analysis of -er nominals in English has been extended by subsequent studies, which propose three main distinctions: eventive -er nominals, non-eventive -er nominals, and a third category that argues against the presence of any grammatical event inside these nominals. Eventive -er nominals require the occurrence of an actual event, while non-eventive -er nominals do not entail such an event. Rappaport and Levin (1992) provided examples to illustrate this distinction, such as "a saver of lives" versus "a life-saver," where the former implies actual involvement in saving lives, while the latter does not necessarily entail any specific action. These distinctions align with Grimshaw's broader framework and have been further refined by later studies. The classification of -er nominals in English is echoed in other languages. For instance, Roy and Soare (2012) examined -eur nominals in French, dividing them into episodic, dispositional, and instrumental categories. Episodic nominals refer to specific underlying events, dispositional nominals refer to general events, and instrumental nominals lack eventive readings altogether. These classifications reveal similar underlying principles across languages regarding the relationship between nominalization and event structure.

2.2 Agentive Nominalizations in Arabic

Initial research on agentive nominalizations in Arabic has primarily focused on Modern Arabic (MSA). In MSA, active participles are derived from trilateral and quadrilateral root verbs, following specific morphological patterns. For example, the active participle *faa'il* is formed when the second consonant of the root verb is followed by the vowel /aa/, as seen in *kātib* (writer) from the root verb *kataba* (write). Other patterns include *fa'iil* and *muf'il*, which are used for different root structures and verb types. These

participles serve as agentive nominalizations, denoting the doer of an action, and are equivalent to English -er nominals such as 'doctor' or 'researcher'. Research on participles in Arabic dialects has expanded to include regional variations. Mohaidat (2017) investigated the use of active participles in Rural Palestinian Dialect (RPD), noting that many of the patterns found in MSA, such as *faaʿil* and *faʿiil*, are also present in RPD. However, RPD exhibits unique derivational strategies, such as the use of the suffix -ji (e.g., *kahwa-ji* 'coffee maker') and the prefix *baf-* (e.g., *baf-muhandis* 'engineer'), strategies not used in MSA.

Similarly, Hallman (2017) examined the semantics of active participles in contemporary Syrian Arabic (CSA), identifying two distinct readings: the 'perfect' reading and the 'progressive' reading. For instance, in the phrase *mā:hir ʿā:rif d3-d3awā:b* ('Mahir knows the answer'), the participle *ʿā:rif* ('knowing') conveys a progressive/stative interpretation, whereas in *mā:hir fātiḥ f-jībāk* ('Mahir has opened the window'), the participle *fātiḥ* ('opening') conveys a perfect/eventive interpretation. This distinction between progressive and perfect readings highlights the diverse semantic roles participles can play in Arabic dialects.

2.3 Agentive Nominalizations in Saudi Dialects

Research on Saudi dialects has further enriched the understanding of *ʿism l-fāʿil* (active participles) in Arabic. Al-Azraqi (1998) provided a detailed description of the syntax of active participles in Abha Southern Arabic, highlighting their use of the *faaʿil* pattern, as well as the use of *siyagh al-mubālaghah* (overwhelming forms), such as *sayyād* ('hunter'), to denote intensive actions or frequent doers of an action. Al-Azraqi also noted that active participles in this dialect take genitive relationships, mirroring patterns found in MSA. Makkawi (2015) examined the participles in Saudi Makkani Arabic (MA), arguing that these forms display both verbal and nominal properties, making them mixed categories. Makkawi's findings align with broader linguistic theory regarding the dual nature of participles, reinforcing the argument that participles occupy a unique grammatical space between verbs and nouns. Almalky (2021) focused on the syntax of active participles in the Saudi Hajazi dialect (HA), proposing a classification of participles into three types: nominal participles, deverbal participles, and adjectival participles. Almalky emphasized the importance of distinguishing between these categories based on their syntactic and semantic properties, arguing that such distinctions are essential for accurately determining the categorial status of participles in Arabic dialects.

2.4 Participles as Mixed Categories

Mixed categories, where a linguistic form exhibits properties of more than one grammatical category, have been central to theoretical discussions in Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) and other syntactic frameworks. Participles are often analysed as such mixed categories, displaying both verbal and adjectival or nominal features. Bresnan (1997), in her study of adjectival participles in German, illustrated how participles can take verbal complements and modifiers while still displaying adjectival agreement morphology. This dual nature of participles necessitates a shared head analysis, where both verbal and adjectival properties are integrated into a single syntactic structure. Bresnan and Mugane (2006) further explored agentive nominalizations in Gikūyū, an East African language. They demonstrated how agentive nominalizations in Gikūyū are formed by adding an agentive suffix and a nominal class marker prefix to a verbal base. These nominalizations can take both verbal and nominal dependents, indicating their mixed syntactic nature. This pattern, seen in other languages such as German and Arabic, supports the argument that agentive nominalizations are inherently mixed categories that require careful analysis within syntactic theory.

2.5 Initial Conclusions

The body of research on agentive nominalizations and participles across languages highlights the complexity and diversity of these forms. Studies on Arabic, German, French, and Gikūyū demonstrate that participles, as mixed categories, blur the lines between verbal and nominal properties. In Arabic, both MSA and dialectal studies reveal a rich array of participial forms that reflect regional linguistic diversity while adhering to broader morphological patterns. This literature provides a foundation for further research on the role of participles in lesser-studied dialects, including BCA. By building on the syntactic and semantic frameworks established in previous research, the present study can expand the horizon of participle analysis, particularly in languages and dialects where agentive nominalizations remain understudied.

3. Methodology

The study examined active participles in Bisha Colloquial Arabic (BCA) by analyzing selected discourse samples from two main sources. The first source comprised data collected from 20 undergraduate students majoring in English language and translation during their interactions in syntax classes. These classroom discussions provided rich examples of active participle usage in a natural academic context. The second source involved social media content, where additional active participle forms were gathered to capture a broader range of discourse styles and contexts. The analysis focused on systematically identifying and extracting active participles from these samples. The lexical items were then categorized into three main types based on their categorial forms in BCA: nominal participles, deverbal participles, and adjectival participles. This classification provided a structured approach to understanding the various functions and forms of active participles within the dialect. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data collection and classification processes, the findings were reviewed and validated by two experts in the fields of English syntax, Arabic syntax, and English-Arabic translation. The study's findings were reported qualitatively, offering an in-depth exploration of active participles in BCA and highlighting their categorial distinctions and functional roles.

agreement, these nominalized participles agree with their subject in number and gender. Distribution: deverbal participles occur in the same syntactic positions as their corresponding verbs, functioning as predicates in both verbal and non-verbal sentences.

3.4 Adjectival Participles

Definition: Adjectival active participles function as adjectives, exhibiting properties typical of Arabic adjectives. They are classified into two subcategories: predicative adjectival participles and attributive adjectival participles. Their internal syntax show that they can function as Predicative adjectival or Attributive adjectival participles. **Predicative adjectival participles:** These can serve as predicates in verbless constructions or complement copulas (overt or null) and must agree with the subject in number and gender, as in *الدخان طار* ad-dūxān zār 'Smoking is harmful'. They follow a definiteness restriction, forcing them to be morphosyntactically indefinite in predicational constructions as in *البيت واسع* I-bēt wāsiʕ 'The house is spacious'. Additionally, adjectival active participles in BA take degree modifiers as *مراه* 'very' as in *البيت مره واسع* I-bēt marrah wāsiʕ 'The house is very spacious'. Such participles can form comparatives as *بيتنا أوسع من بيتكم* bēt-na ʔawasiʕ min bēt-kum 'Our house is more spacious than yours' and they can form superlatives as well, as in *بيتنا أوسع بيت في بيشه* bēt-na ʔawasiʕ bēt fi Bisha 'Our house is the most spacious house in Bisha.' **Attributive adjectival participles:** These agree with the nouns they modify in definiteness, gender, and number. Attributive adjectival participles as in *بنت راسبه* bint rāsab-ah 'a failed girl' or *البنت الراسبه* I-bint r-rāsab-ah 'The failed girl'. **Nominal Properties of Adjectival Participles:** Both types exhibit properties typical of Arabic adjectives, they can head CS constructions as in *حافي القدم* ḥāfi I-gadam 'The barefoot', and take degree modifiers as in *مراه واسع* marrah wāsiʕ 'very spacious', forming comparatives as in *أوسع من* ʔawasiʕ min 'more spacious' or superlatives as in *الأوسع* ʔawasiʕ 'the most spacious', similar to other adjectival structures. **External Syntax:** These adjectival participles occupy positions typical of adjectives and can head CS constructions.

Based on the described data, this study posits that nominal (agentive) participles function as pure noun phrases (NPs), primarily serving to denote agents or entities. Conversely, deverbal participles are classified as specialized verbal phrases (VPPs), as they retain certain verbal properties while simultaneously performing nominal or adjectival roles. Adjectival participles, however, are treated as standard adjectives (APs), conforming to the syntactic and semantic functions typically associated with descriptive modifiers. These assumptions align with previous syntactic analysis within the theory of Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG).

4. Results and Discussion

This research study was conducted basically to answer the following three research questions:

RQ #1: *What are the different morphological types of active participles in BA?*

RQ #2: *What are the syntactic properties of active participles in BA?*

RQ #3: *To what extent do active participles in BCA resemble their equivalents in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and other Arabic dialects?*

Based on the given data, the following results have been found:

It has been found that there are three categories of active participle nominalizations in BCA:

Nominal (Agentive) Participles: Function as nouns, participating in CS constructions, and accepting nominal modifiers (e.g., adjectives and demonstratives).

Deverbal Participles: Derived from verbs, these participles retain verbal properties, including argument structure and the ability to take adverbs and pronominal objects.

Adjectival Participles: Function as adjectives, agreeing with nouns in gender and number, and can serve in predicative or attributive roles.

Based on the data, nominal participles are treated as regular nouns based on their nominal properties such as occurring in normal structural positions of nouns, participating in CS constructions, and having nominal modifiers. It has also been found that deverbal active participles retain their verbal properties, including aspectual marking, argument structure, and pronominal object agreement, while functioning as participial phrases in the sentence. These participles occur in the same structural positions as their corresponding verbs, and their internal syntax behaves like that of verbal predicates. The analysis aligns with the argument that deverbal participial phrases should be treated as VPs headed by participial verbs, in accordance with the syntactic frameworks of Lowe (2016) and Almalky (2021). Additionally, the LFG analysis highlights the dual nature of adjectival participles in BCA as both attributive and predicative elements, functioning similarly to adjectives in their external and internal syntax. In contrast with the

theoretical assumptions proposed by Roy and Soare (2012) that suggest that agentive nominalizations involve syntactic verb phrases (VPs) based on their semantic eventivity, this study assumes a counterargument that asserts that agentive nominalizations in BCA do not exhibit this kind of semantic eventivity. Instead, they are considered pure NPs constructions, showing exclusively nominal properties such as nominal complements, adjectival modifiers, and other NP-style components. The analysis of adjectival participles in BCA as special VPPs based on their verbal properties such functioning as aspectual marking indicators, having argument structure, and taking adverbial modifiers is in accordance with previous assumptions made by Almalky (2021). In addition, the analysis of adjectival participles in BCA as normal adjectives is in accordance with the assumptions adopted in Alharthy (2021) and Almalky (2021) in analyzing adjectival active participles within the theory of LFG.

Active participles in BCA share several morphological and syntactic features with their counterparts in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and other Arabic dialects while also exhibiting unique characteristics. These similarities and differences highlight the dynamic nature of Arabic, as both standard and dialectal varieties adapt to regional and social contexts. Active participles in BCA are derived using patterns similar to those in MSA, such as the productive *faʿil* template (e.g., *katib* for "writing" or *samiʿ* for "hearing"). These forms maintain their dual nominal-verbal nature, functioning as adjectives and nouns. For example, they can describe a state (*Ali kaatib* - "Ali writing") or serve as nouns (*al-kaatib* - "the writer"). This duality aligns closely with MSA, reflecting shared roots in Classical Arabic (CA).

Research by Gadalla (2005) underscores the consistency of such derivations across Arabic varieties, emphasizing the morphological stability of participles in MSA and dialects. While the core morphological structure is shared, phonological changes in BCA, such as vowel shifts and consonantal simplifications, make participles sound distinct from MSA. Additionally, participles in BCA often acquire localized meanings, reflecting their idiomatic and contextual usage. For instance, participles in BCA might emphasize habitual actions more prominently than in MSA, a phenomenon observed in several southern Arabic dialects (Al-Rabaʿa, 2021). A significant divergence from MSA lies in the agreement patterns of active participles. In MSA, participles follow strict rules for gender, number, and definiteness. In contrast, BCA often simplifies these rules, favoring efficiency and communicative ease. This feature is not unique to BCA; many Arabic dialects, including Egyptian and Gulf Arabic, exhibit similar tendencies (Eades & Persson, 2013). BCA's participles align closely with those of southern Saudi dialects, sharing similar morphological and syntactic properties. However, compared to Egyptian Arabic, where participles frequently function in verbal constructs, BCA maintains a balance between nominal and adjectival roles. In Gulf Arabic, participles often extend to describe resultative states, a trait less prevalent in BCA but common in MSA (Hallman, 2017). The following table summarizes how the present work analyses the three different morphological types of active participles in BA:

Table 1. The Different Morphological Types of Active Participles Found in BCA

Morphological Types	Properties	Assumed Category
Nominal (Agentive) Participles	nominal	nouns
Deverbal Participles	verbal	Special verbs (VPPs)
Adjectival Participles	adjectival	adjectives

5. Conclusion

This article has explored three distinct types of participles in Arabic: Nominal (Agentive) Participles, Deverbal Participles, and Adjectival Participles, highlighting their unique syntactic and semantic properties. **Nominal (Agentive) Participles** serve as nominalized agents, functioning as fully-fledged nouns derived from verbs. They exhibit flexibility in denoting specificity and animacy, and can occupy a range of syntactic positions within noun phrases. Their ability to form Construct State constructions and accept adjectival modification further underscores their role in Arabic as central components in noun-based structures. **Deverbal Participles**, on the other hand, retain several key verbal characteristics from their source verbs, including argument structure, aspect, and the capacity for adverbial modification. Their syntactic behavior mirrors that of verbs, while still functioning within nominal structures. The presence of both verbal and nominal features allows these participles to operate flexibly within sentences, fulfilling roles that bridge verbal and nominal domains. **Adjectival Participles** function primarily as adjectives and contribute to the descriptive capacity of the language. They modify nouns through agreement in number, gender, and definiteness, and participate in comparative and superlative constructions. Their dual role in predicative and attributive constructions enriches the language's adjectival system, offering nuanced means of description and classification.

It has been observed that participles in Bisha Colloquial Arabic (BCA) follow the same *faʿil* template used to form participles in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). This shared morphological foundation highlights the close relationship between BCA and MSA. However, a significant divergence arises in the agreement patterns of active participles. In MSA, participles adhere to strict rules

for gender, number, and definiteness, ensuring grammatical concordance in various syntactic contexts. In contrast, BCA simplifies these rules, prioritizing efficiency and communicative ease in everyday usage. Despite these differences, BCA participles retain many morphological and syntactic features shared with their MSA counterparts and other Arabic dialects. BCA participles align closely with those of southern Saudi dialects, exhibiting similar properties in both form and function. However, they differ from Egyptian Arabic, where participles frequently play a verbal role, often functioning as predicates. BCA, on the other hand, strikes a balance between nominal and adjectival uses, reflecting its unique linguistic context. In Gulf Arabic, participles frequently extend to describe resultative states, a feature less prominent in BCA but more closely aligned with the syntactic traditions of MSA, as highlighted by Hallman (2017). These variations underscore the adaptability of participles across Arabic varieties, as they respond to the phonological, syntactic, and communicative needs of each dialect.

Overall, these participles illustrate the rich morphological and syntactic interplay within Arabic, demonstrating how forms derived from verbs can assume diverse functions while maintaining relationships to their verbal origins. The exploration of these participles provides deeper insight into the structural and functional complexity of Arabic, particularly in how the language manages verbal and nominal derivations to express a wide range of meanings.

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