This paper investigates certain scope effects emanating at the edge of vP in Hindi-Urdu, with sentential expletives in the language serving as the primary empirical domain of our inquiry. We undertake a very thorough investigation of sentential expletives in Hindi-Urdu, specifically with regard to their structural position in the tree, their X-0/XP nature and A/A-bar status. Expletives, we argue, both base-generate and take scope from an A-bar specifier of vP. Further empirical support for the claim that vP hosts scope-taking specifiers comes from constructions with wh-scope markers and long-distance-agreement (LDA). This paper makes the following crucial observations: a) vP is a phase in Hindi-Urdu, b) vP-specifier is a scope determining site and c) both A-bar (expletives, wh-scope markers) as well as A-elements (DPs in LDA structures) may take wide scope from the edge of vP.

Sentential expletives (1) in Hindi-Urdu mark long distance dependencies. ‘Yeh’ is a pronominal expletive that surfaces in the matrix clause and is co-indexed with the finite complement clause (Mahajan 1990, Dayal 1994). It facilitates a wide scope reading for the embedded sentence. Sentence (1) can be roughly paraphrased as, ‘That Sohan will come, Ram told Sita about it’. It is our objective here to investigate the exact location of ‘yeh’ in these structures.

First, we present evidence from constituency tests (2)-(3) showing that the expletive is part of the matrix vP. In (2), the vP, along with the expletive moves to the left periphery of the sentence. In contrast, movement of the ‘vP’ alone – leaving the expletive behind – generates ungrammaticality as in (3). This contrast suggests that the expletive is a part of the matrix vP. It is stranded inside the vP and cannot move beyond it.

Second, we show that ‘yeh’ is a phrase XP, and not a head X-0. This is illustrated in (4), where the complex head/predicate moves across the expletive. Head movement would have been impossible here, had the expletive been a head (by Travis’ 1984 Head Movement Constraint). Moreover, ‘yeh’ can be separated from the verbal head by an adverbial, as illustrated in (5)-(6). This is additional support for our claim that the expletive is not an X-0, but an XP that is placed at the specifier of vP.

Third, ‘yeh’ is in an A-bar specifier of vP. This is evidenced by the unacceptability of structures like (7), where the wh-phrase and the expletive fail to co-exist in the same structure. Since the wh-element moves from an embedded clause position to occupy an A-bar position in the matrix clause, it must cross the expletive, which also holds an A-bar position. This gives rise to Relativized Minimality (RM) effects. Crucially, RM effects are not observed when an element A-moves over the expletive, as shown in (8).

Given these characteristics of ‘yeh’, we claim that vP in Hindi-Urdu is a phase with specifiers that host items like expletives. The expletive fails to move beyond this point, as suggested by the constituency tests. Hence, the scope of such expletives must also be determined at the vP-level.

Sentential expletives are however not the only elements to take scope at the edge of matrix vP. Wh-scope markers must also pass through these sites, as can be judged from their positions vis-à-vis vP-adverbials (9) and indirect objects (10); scope markers always follow these items. We take these and related facts (as discussed in Malhotra and Chandra 2007) to contend that wh-scope markers are placed at vP-specifiers from where they also take scope. Interestingly, vP-specifiers also host A-elements, which are permitted to take wide scope as well. The semantic difference between (11) and (12), taken from Bhatt (2005) attests to this fact; only agreeing objects in LDA structures may take wide scope vis-à-vis the matrix predicate. Following Chandra (2007), we therefore contend that the agreeing embedded object (11) moves to the specifier of matrix vP for case/agreement, consequently gaining scope over the volitional matrix verb ‘want’. This movement option is unavailable for the non-agreeing nominal in (12); hence the narrow scope reading.

To conclude, our paper puts forwards novel empirical evidence from sentential expletives suggesting that matrix vP in Hindi-Urdu is a phase that hosts specifiers used as landing sites for both A and A-bar elements. Sentential expletives, wh-scope markers as well as LDA objects can take scope from these sites.
(1) raamne siitaako yeh kahaa thaa [ki sohan aayegaa]
   Ram    Sita        this said be [that Sohan come-fut]
   ‘Ram told Sita that Sohan will come’

(2) ?[yeh kahaa thaa ki sohan aa-yegaa]-i raamne siitako t-i
   [this said that that Sohan come-fut] Ram    Sita
   ‘Ram told Sita that Sohan will come’

(3) *[kahaa thaa ki sohan aa-yegaa]-i raamne siitako yeh t-i
   [said that that Sohan come-fut] Ram    Sita this
   ‘Ram told Sita that Sohan will come’

(4) ?[pyaar-karta-hai]-i sohanne yeh kahaa ram siitase t-i
   [love-do-be] Sohan this said Ram Sitaa
   ‘Sohan said that Ram loves Sita’

(5) raamko yeh aksar lagtaa hai [ki sohan aayegaa]
   Ram     this often feels be [that Sohan come-fut]
   ‘Ram often feels that Sohan will come’

(6) ?raamne yeh zarur kahaa thaa [ki sohan aayegaa]
   Ram     this definitely said be [that Sohan come-fut]
   ‘Ram definitely said that Sohan will come’

(7) *kisko-i raamne yeh sochaa [ki Mohanne t-i maaraa] who
   Ram     this thought [that Mohan hit]
   ‘Who did Ram think that Mohan hit?’

(8) ?siitase-i, raamko yeh lagtaa hai [ki sohan t-i pyaar-karta-hai]
   Sita    Ram    this feel be [that Sohan love-do-be]
   ‘Ram feels that Sohan loves Sita’

(9) raamne [sharmate hue kyaa kahaa ki kaun aaye-gaa]
   Ram     coyly-with what said that who come-will
   ‘Who did Ram coyly say would come?’

(10) raamne [mirako kyaa bataya ki kaun aaye-gaa]
    Ram     [Mira     what told that who come-will]
    ‘Who did Ram tell Mira will come?’

(11) naimne [har kitaab paRhni] chaahii
    ‘Naim wanted to read every book’
    (every book > want; want > every book)

(12) naimne [har kitaab paRhnaa] chaahaa
    Naim    [every book-fem. read-default. want-default
    ‘Naim wanted to read every book’
    (want > every book; *every book > want)

References: