Matsigenka (also known as Machiguenga, ISO mcb), is a language belonging to the Arawakan family. This traditional story was written by Sr. Haroldo Vargas Pereira in February 2011 in Quillabamba, as part of a handwritten corpus of traditional stories commissioned from him by Lev Michael and Christine Beier. We are grateful for funding from Cabeceras Aid Project and a grant to Michael from the Hellman Family Faculty Fund at the University of California, Berkeley, for our team’s ongoing work on Matsigenka documentation and description.

To understand the cultural significance of this story, it is helpful to know that sweet manioc is the foundation of the Matsigenka diet. Notably, the word for manioc, sekatsi, not only refers to manioc but also is a nominalized form of the verb root seka ‘eat’. The Matsigenka orthography differs from the one used in Snell’s (2011) dictionary in only one way: we use “n” for the place-assimilating nasal in all cases.

(1) Antari pairani, iketeyorira timaigatsi tera ineaigero sekatsi,\(^1\) onti  
ipegaigi sekatsi tsireri kipatsi.\(^2\)  
antae=ri pairani i–ketyo=rira  
there=CTRS long.ago 3MASC:MOD–first=REL  
tima=ig–ats–i tera  
i–ne=a–ig–e=ro sekatsi  
o-nti i–peg–a–ig–i  
sekatsi tsire=ri kipatsi  
manioc be.sticky–ADJR soil  
‘Long ago, the first (people) who lived did not know of manioc, but rather they treated clay as manioc.’

\(^1\) Mixed-gender groups trigger masculine agreement.  
\(^2\) Feminine gender is used for both female animate and inanimate referents.
(2) Antari anta otimira kiteari nia, itimake paniro matsigenka itenta
ijina, intiri itomiegi ontiri irishintoegi.

anta=ri anta o–tim–i=ra
there=CTRS there 3FEM:SUBJ–exist–REAL=SBD
kite–a–ri nia i–tim–ak–e
paniro matsigenka i–tent–a
one.an person 3MASC:SUBJ–accompany–REAL
i–jina i–ntiri i–tom–e
o–ntiri iri–shinto–egi
3FEM:MOD–COORD 3MASC:POSS–daughter–PL

‘There where there is a yellow river, there lived a man
accompanied by his wife, sons, and daughters.’

(3) Iriroegi omirinka kutagiteri iaigi inkamovageigera aikiro inkogaigera
tsireri kipatsi irogaigakenpara.

iriro–egi omirinka kutagiteri i–a–ig–i
3MASC:PRO–PL always day 3MASC:SUBJ–go–PL–REAL
i–n–kamo–vage–ig–e=ra aikiro
3MASC:SUBJ–IRR–dam.arm.of.river–DUR–PL–IRR=SBD also
i–n–kog–a–ig–e=ra tsire–ri
i–r–og–a–ig–ak–enpa=ra kipatsi

‘They went every day to dam the river (to fish) and to look for clay
to eat.’

(4) Inpo aganaka antarotakera irishinto.4

inpo ag–an–ak–a
then arrive.day–ABL–PFV–REAL
o–antaro–t–ak–e=ra
iri–shinto
3MASC:POSS–daughter

‘Then came the day when his daughter became a woman (her first
menstruation).’

3 The narrator clarified that this is a reference to a settlement on the upper Urubamba river
called Kiteni, which used to be a Matsigenka community but has grown into a mixed Matsigenka-
mestizo town.

4 Many Matsigenka directionals, like the ablative -an, have aspectual senses, and some addi-
tionally have associated motion interpretations when appearing with non-motion verb roots.
Similarly, some associated motion suffixes have aspectual meanings. Because the precise nature
of the aspectual meanings of several such suffixes is still unclear, all suffixes of this type that
appear in this text are glossed solely in terms of their primary motion-related meanings.
(5) Ogari iniro ashitakotakero tsonpogi.

'o–oga=ri o–i=niro

3FEM:MOD–MED.DEM=CTRS  3FEM:POSS–mother

o–ashi–t–ako–t–ak–e=ro tsonpogi


'Her mother enclosed her inside (an enclosure in their house).'

(6) Antari oatakera onkamoigera, oganainiro omire ontiri oseka tsonpogi.

anta=ri o–a–t–ak–e=ra


o–n–kamo–ig–e=ra

3FEM:SUBJ–IRR–dam.arm.of.river–PL–IRR=SBD

o–og–an–a–i=ni=ro


o–mire o–ntiri o–seka tsonpogi

3FEM:POSS–beverage 3FEM:MOD–COORD 3FEM:POSS–food inside

'When she (the mother) went to dam the river, she left her drink and her food inside (her enclosure).'

(7) Agaka kutagiteri opitake tsonpogi, okemiri yanutapaï tyanirika.

o–ag–ak–a kutagiteri

3FEM:SUBJ–arrive.day–PFV–REAL day

o–pi–t–ak–e


tsonpogi o–kem–i=ri

inside 3FEM:SUBJ–hear–REAL=3MASC:O

y–anu–t–apa–i ty–n=ni=ri=ka


'O one day she (the daughter) was sitting inside and she heard someone walking up.'

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5 This sentence illustrates the Matsigenka tradition of secluding a woman for the month or so following her first menstruation. Traditionally, she was secluded within a temporary enclosure constructed of large shitatsi mats (woven from Gynerium sagittatum leaves) inside her mother’s house, where she would spend all her days and nights until her mother decided to end the seclusion. The young woman was not to be seen by anyone at all, and especially not by men, including her own close kin, so the young woman’s behavior in this story is extremely unusual. Note that while our narrator does not explicitly state that she was inside such an enclosure, and while his own Spanish translation simply says ‘inside the house’, we consider it a reasonable inference that she would have been inside the kind of enclosure we describe here.
Irorori otsaroganake omananaka, kantankicha okemiri iniapai —

irorori teratyo ankeri, tera onieri.

iroro=ri  o–tsarog–an–ak–e
3FEM:PRO=CTRS 3FEM:SUBJ–startle–ABL–PFV–REAL

3FEM:PRO=CTRS 3FEM:SUBJ–hide–ABL–PFV–REAL  but


o–kem–i=ri i–ni–apa–i

io=ri tera=tyo o–n–ak–e=ri
3FEM:PRO=CTRS NEG.REAL=AFF 3FEM:SUBJ–IRR–respond–IRR=3MASC:O

tera o–ni–e=ri
NEG.REAL 3FEM:SUBJ–speak–IRR=3MASC:O

‘She became frightened and she hid herself, but she heard him speak when he got there (to the house) — she did not respond to him or speak to him.’

Kantankicha irorori arionpa inianakeri ovashi okontetanake

oniakerira.

3MASC:PRO=CTRS continue

i–ni–an–ak–e=ri ovashi
3MASC:SUBJ–speak–ABL–PFV–REAL=CONT so


o–ni–ak–e=ri=ra
3FEM:SUBJ–speak–PFV–REAL=3MASC:O=SBD

‘But he continued speaking, so she came out to speak to him.’

Yogari irorori inti kashiri, 6 yagutakera savi ipeganakara surari.

6 The perceptive reader will note the similarity between the Matsigenka kashiri ‘moon’ and the Iquito kásiiri ‘moon’. The Matsigenka word has cognates across the Arawakan family, and is plainly a reflex of the Proto-Arawakan word with the same meaning. The fact that Iquito, a Zaparoan language, exhibits a seemingly related word for ‘moon’ is striking but inexplicable at the moment. No Arawakan languages are spoken near Iquito territory, nor is there any historical record of any such language. Among the Zaparoan languages, the Záparo (Sápara) term kaʃiikʷa ‘moon’ is probably cognate to the Iquito one, but the Arabela term raka ‘moon’ and the Andoa term araka ‘moon’ are not.

kashiri y–agu–t–ak–e=ra
3MASC:MOD–MED.DEM=CTRS 3MASC:PRO=CTRS 3MASC:SUBJ–COP


savi i–peg–an–ak–a=ra surari
below 3MASC:SUBJ–transform–ABL–PFV–REAL=SBD male

‘He was the moon, who had come down to the earth, transformed into a man.’
(11) Samani ipirinivagetake ikenkitsavageigakera.
   samani i–pirinivage–t–ak–e
   i–kenkitsa–vage–ig–ak–e=ra

   ‘They conversed for a long time.’

(12) Antari ikatinkaapaakera poreatsiri, irorori oshirinkakotakeneneri
tsireri kipatsi, okantiri, “Nero sekatsi.”
   anta=ri i–katinka–apa–ak–e=ra
   there=CTRS 3MASC:SUBJ–be.straight.up–ALL–PFV–REAL=SBD
   poreatsiri iroro=ri
   sun 3FEM:PRO=CTRS
   o–shirink–akot–ak–e=ne=ri
   tsire–ri kipatsi o–kant=i=ri
   be.sticky–ADJR soil 3FEM:SUBJ–say–REAL=3MASC:O
   nero sekatsi
   PRSNT manioc

   ‘At noon, she slid a vessel of clay towards him, and she said, “Here
   you go, manioc.”’

(13) Irirori ineavakerora itsarogakaganakaro, ikantiro, “Ogari oga tera
    iroro sekatsi, onti kipatsi.”
   iriro=ri
   3MASC:PRO=CTRS
   i–ne–av–ak–e=ro=ra
   i–tsarogakag–an–ak–a=ro
   3MASC:SUBJ–have.pity.on–ABL–PFV–REAL=3FEM:O
   i–kant=i=ro
   3MASC:SUBJ–say–REAL=3FEM:O 3FEM:MOD–MED.DEM=CTRS
   o–oga tera iroro sekatsi
   3FEM:MOD–MED.DEM NEG.REAL 3FEM:PRO manioc
   o–nti kipatsi
   3FEM:SUBJ–COP soil

   ‘Seeing it (the food), he felt pity for her, and said to her, “That
   there isn’t manioc; it’s soil.”’

7 This is a highly salient moment from a cultural perspective because offering food to visitors
   is an appropriate, even expected, part of social relationships; but at the same time, the gifting of
   food between young, single people is a defining element of the courtship process.
(14) “Atsi nokotagenpiro sekatsisanorira?”

\[
\text{DRCT 1SUBJ--show--IRR=2O=3FEM;O manioc--VERIF=REL}.
\]

‘Shall I show you real manioc?’

(15) Ovashi yokotagakero, ipakero ogakarora.

\[
\text{then 3MASC:SUBJ--show--PFV--REAL=3FEM;O}
\]

‘So then he showed it to her, he gave it to her, and she ate it.’

(16) Yogari irirori omirinka ipokanake, ovashi inintavakaganaka, yamevakagaiganaka.

‘He came every day, so they fell in love and became comfortable with each other.’

(17) Ogari iniro tera ogote, opanavetaaro tsireri kipatsi, teratyo ogaenparo —

‘Her mother did not know, and she gave her clay again and again, but she did not eat it — ’
(18) osokavakero aityara.

She threw it out behind the house.

(19) Oneakerora iniro ikisavetakarora;

When her mother saw this she was angry;

(20) ovashi okantiro onoshikanakera papoatiro sekatsi, “Nero oka sekatsisanorira — ogari oga onti kipatsi.”

so she (the daughter) said to her, pulling out a manioc tuber, “This is real manioc — that’s soil.”

(21) Ogotagaigakeri tyara okanta ogaganira, iriroegi yogaiganakarotyo otaki;

‘She taught them how it (manioc) is eaten, and they ate it including its peel;’

8 Masculine gender may be used for female referents to disambiguate a switch in reference.
9 From a historical perspective, this is a deliberately humorous element of the story, because no Matsigenkas in their right mind would eat the peel.
(22) ogari iniro okantiro, “Noshinto, tyani makenpirora oga sekatsi?”
o–oga=ri o–iniro
3FEM:MOD–MED.DEM=CTRS 3FEM:POSS–mother

o–kant–i=ro
3FEM:SUBJ–say–REAL=3FEM:O

no–shinto tya–ni am–ak–e=npi=ro=ra
1POSS–daughter who–AN bring–PFV–REAL=2O=3FEM:O=SBD

o–oga sekatsi
3FEM:MOD–MED.DEM manioc

‘her mother said to her, “Daughter, who brought you this manioc?”’

(23) Irorori okantiro, “Inti pitineri, noneakerira.”
iroro=ri o–kant–i=ro i–nti
3FEM:PRO=CTRS 3FEM:SUBJ–say–REAL=3FEM:O 3MASC:SUBJ–COP

pi–tineri no–ne–ak–e=rira
2POSS–son-in-law 1SUBJ–see–PFV–REAL=REL

‘She (the daughter) said to her, “It was your son-in-law, whom I have seen.”’

(24) Ovashi okotagantakeri aikiro irirori, itsarogavetaka otyara,
kantankicha arionpa yameigana kari iraniriegi aikiro iri ontiri iniro.

ovashi o–okotag–ant–ak–e=ri aikiro then 3FEM:SUBJ–show–ANTIP–PFV–REAL=3MASC:O also

iriro=ri i–tsarog–a–ve–t–ak–a

o–tya=ra kantankicha arionpa
3FEM:MOD–when=SBD but continue

y–ame–ig–an–ak–a=ri

ir–aniri–egi aikiro o–iri
3MASC:POSS–brother.in.law–PL also 3FEM:POSS–father

o–ntiri o–iniro
3FEM:MOD–COORD 3FEM:POSS–mother

‘Then she presented him (to her parents), and at first he was frightened, but gradually he became comfortable with his brothers-in-law, and also her father and her mother.’
(25) Yogari kashiri itimuntevagetanake kipatsiku, yamagetake posantepage oegitatsirira.

'yoga=ri kashiri
3MASC:MOD–MED.DEM=CTRS moon
kipatsiku y am a ge t ak e
posante page oegi–ats–i=rira
various.things=PL be.round.tuber–EP–SUBJ.EXTR.IPFV–REAL=REL

'The moon lived on earth for a long time and he brought all kinds of tuber-bearing plants.'

(26) Yogotagaigakeri iraniriegi ipankiigakerora tsamairintsiku.

'yogotag–a–ig–ak–e=ri
ir–aniri–egi
3MASC:POSS–brother-in-law–PL
i–panki–ig–ak–e=ro=ra
tsamai–ri–ntsi=ku
cultivate–NMZ–ALIEN=LOC

'He taught his brothers-in-law to plant them in their gardens.'

(27) Avisanakera tovai kutagiteri, ikoganakera intomintakenpara, yamanakera ijina oaku, ikanitori, "Piate intati nia, pinpiriniatake."

'o–avis–an–ak–e=ra tovai
many
kutagiteri i–kog–an–ak–e=ra
day
3MASC:SUBJ–want–ABL–PFV–REAL=SBD
i–n–tomint–ak–enpa=ra
3MASC:SUBJ–IRR–have.child–PFV–IRR=SBD
y–am–an–ak–e=ra
oaku i–kant–i=ro
river
intati nia pi–n–pirini–a t ak e
other.side.of.river water

'Many days having passed, and (the moon) wanting to have a child, he brought his wife to the river and said to her, "Go to the other side of the river and sit in the water."'

10 In addition to manioc, several other tuberous plants are essential to the traditional Matsigenka diet, so this is another historically important moment in the story.
(28) Pinearika intsagatapaakenpi kañotaka kironpi, gara pitinaa, aikiro gara pikaemi.

pi–ne–e=rīka

2SUBJ–feel–IRR=TEMP.INDF


kaño–t–ak–a

be.like–EP–PFV–REAL fish.SP NEG.IRR

pi–tina–a

aikiro gara

pi–kaem–i

2SUBJ–get.up–REAL also NEG.IRR 2SUBJ–call.out–REAL

‘If you feel something touching you like a kironpi, don’t get up and don’t cry out.’

(29) Kantankicha irorori oneiri itsagatapaakero kironpi ogatyo okenake okaviriatapatunata okaemanakera.

kantankicha iroro=rī

o–ne–i=rī

but 3FEM:PRO=CTRS 3FEM:SUBJ–feel–REAL=3MASC:O

i–tsaga–t–apa–ak–e=ro


oga=tyo

o–ken–ak–e

suddenly=AFF 3FEM:SUBJ–begin–PFV–REAL

o–kaviri–a–t–apanu–t–a=ra


o–kaem–an–ak–e=ra

3FEM:SUBJ–call.out–ABL–PFV–REAL=SBD

‘But when she felt the kironpi touching her, she began to get up to go, crying out.’

(30) Oshigavagetanaara pankotsiku.

o–shig–a–vage–t–an–a–a=ra


‘She ran to the house.’

(31) Irirori yogiatanairo inkisavagetenpa kara.

iriro=rī

y–ogia–t–an–a–i=rō


i–n–kis–a–vage–t–enpa


‘He followed her, very angry.’

11 While human/non-human couplings are very common in the Matsigenka cannon of traditional and origin stories, reproduction within such pairings is often problematic, as seen in this episode of the story. A kironpi is a type of small, slender, bottom-feeding fish with long barbels.
(32) Inpo irorori oneavaka ariomonkitanake, ovashi yaganakara
omechotakera tera agavee, ovashi okamake.
inpo iroro=ri o–ne–av–ak–a
then 3FEM:PRO=CTRS 3FEM:SUBJ–see–ASSOC.MOT:S/O–PFV–REAL
o–ariomonki–t–an–ak–e ovashi
3FEM:SUBJ–be.pregnant–EP–ABL–PFV–REAL then
y–ag–an–ak–a=ra
3MASC:SUBJ–arrive.day–ABL–PFV–REAL=SBD
o–mechot–ak–e=ra tera
o–agave–e ovashi o–kam–ak–e
3FEM:SUBJ–be.able–IRR so 3FEM:SUBJ–die–PFV–REAL
‘Then she saw that she was pregnant, and the day arrived when she
was to give birth, but she was unable (to give birth), and so she
died.’

(33) Ogari iniro okisakotanakaro oshinto.
o–oga=ri o–iniro
3FEM:MOD–MED.DEM=CTRS 3FEM:POSS–mother
o–kis–ako–t–an–ak–a=ro
o–shinto
3FEM:POSS–daughter
‘Her mother was very angry about her daughter (having died).’

(34) Yogari ojime ikantanavetakaro, “Kantaka, ineakarorokari irirori—
y–oga=ri o–jime
3MASC:MOD–MED.DEM=CTRS 3FEM:POSS–husband
i–kant–a–na–ve–t–ak–a=ro
kantaka i–ne–ak–a=rorokari
leave.it 3MASC:SUBJ–know–PFV–REAL=EPIST
iriro=ri
3MASC:PRO=CTRS
‘Her husband (of the mother, the young woman’s father) said,
“Leave it (her body), he should know (what to do with her
body)—’

(35) “Ogamerika intime aka.”
ogamerika i–n–tim–e aka
NEG.COUPRESUP 3MASC:SUBJ–IRR–live–IRR here
‘‘It’s not as if he lives here.’’
(36) Oshigatematanakari osagutantakarira oriraa okantakerira, “Nero oga — maika gaenparo, shinkotaero noshinto.”

She ran to him and splashed him with her (daughter’s) blood, saying to him, “There you go — now eat her, smoke my daughter.”

(37) Irirori ikemisantake, inpo iatake oaku ishinpetakerora nia;

He listened silently, and then he went to the river and made a weir; 12

(38) Paita yamanakero ijina yovuokaakitirora.

Later he brought his (deceased) wife and threw her into the water.

12 A shinperentsi is a type of fishing weir constructed by driving strong sticks or poles vertically into the riverbed, to which smaller sticks, or shitatsi mats, are tied horizontally, which creates an obstacle to fish, but not to water. Such weirs are either used in conjunction with kogi ‘barbasco’, in which case the weir is used to prevent stunned or dead fish from being washed downriver; or they are placed in such a way that fish are trapped in them by either the strength of the current, or by the placement of obstacles upriver of the weir. The fact that the moon encounters a tapir in his weir is probably best understood in light of other Matsigenka myths in which people, or their body parts, are reincarnated in Meshiarini, sometimes called “the river of life”. In this story, the tapir is understood to be the reincarnated form of the moon’s wife; and his killing and butchering of her is related to the belief, clarified in other myths, that the moon now views humans as tapirs, suitable for hunting, killing, and eating.
(39) Okutagitevetanaka iaveta inkamosoterora ishinpere, ineapaakeri yagaka kemari.

At dawn the next day he went to check on his weir, and saw there was a tapir in it.

(40) Yamakeri pankotsiku, yogipegoreakeri ovashi ishinkotakeri.

He brought it to the house, cut it into pieces, and then smoked it.

(41) Iposatanakera ikotatanakeri ivatsa, ovashi ikantanairi igokine, “Maika, koki, ataana,

When it was cooked he packed up the meat, and then said to his father-in-law, “Now I am going back, father-in-law,'
"when my (tapir) meat runs out, you will see me return."

‘In the distance they saw him go back, carrying his meat;’

‘he climbed a hill, and then he disappeared in the heavens.’